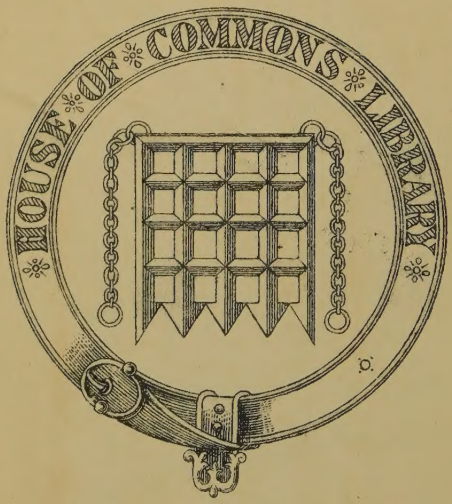
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VOL. V. THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON. FIRST VOLUME

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THE SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

VOL. I

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THE
SMALL HOUSE AT ALLINGTON

CHAPTER I

THE SQUIRE OF ALLINGTON

Of course there was a Great House at Allington. How otherwise should there have been a Small House? Our story will, as its name imports, have its closest relations with those who lived in the less dignified domicile of the two; but it will have close relations also with the more dignified, and it may be well that I should, in the first instance, say a few words as to the Great House and its owner.

The squires of Allington had been squires of Allington since squires, such as squires are now, were first known in England. From father to son, and from uncle to nephew, and, in one instance, from second cousin to second cousin, the sceptre had descended in the family of the Dales; and the acres had remained intact, growing in value and not decreasing in number, though guarded by no entail and protected by no wonderful amount of prudence or wisdom. The estate of Dale of Allington had been coterminous with the parish of Allington for some hundreds of years; and though, as I have said, the race of squires had possessed nothing of superhuman discretion, and had perhaps been guided in their walks through life by no very distinct principles, still there had been with them so much of adherence to a sacred law, that no acre of the property had ever been parted from the hands

of the existing squire. Some futile attempts had been made to increase the territory, as indeed had been done by Kit Dale, the father of Christopher Dale, who will appear as our squire of Allington when the persons of our drama are introduced. Old Kit Dale, who had married money, had bought outlying farms,—a bit of ground here and a bit there,—talking, as he did so, much of political influence and of the good old Tory cause. But these farms and bits of ground had gone again before our time. To them had been attached no religion. When old Kit had found himself pressed in that matter of the majority of the Nineteenth Dragoons, in which crack regiment his second son made for himself quite a career, he found it easier to sell than to save—seeing that that which he sold was his own and not the patrimony of the Dales. At his death the remainder of these purchases had gone. Family arrangements required completion, and Christopher Dale required ready money. The outlying farms flew away, as such new purchases had flown before; but the old patrimony of the Dales remained untouched, as it had ever remained.

It had been a religion among them; and seeing that the worship had been carried on without fail, that the vestal fire had never gone down upon the hearth, I should not have said that the Dales had walked their ways without high principle. To this religion they had all adhered, and the new heir had ever entered in upon his domain without other encumbrances than those with which he himself was then already burdened. And yet there had been no entail. The idea of an entail was not in accordance with the peculiarities of the Dale mind. It was necessary to the Dale religion that each squire should have the power of wasting the acres of Allington,—and that he should abstain from wasting them. I remember to have dined at a house, the whole glory and fortune of which depended on the safety of a glass goblet. We all know the story. If the luck of Edenhall should be shattered, the doom of the family would be sealed. Nevertheless I was bidden

to drink out of the fatal glass, as were all guests in that house. It would not have contented the chivalrous mind of the master to protect his doom by lock and key and padded chest. And so it was with the Dales of Allington. To them an entail would have been a lock and key and a padded chest; but the old chivalry of their house denied to them the use of such protection.

I have spoken something slightingly of the acquirements and doings of the family; and indeed their acquirements had been few and their doings little. At Allington, Dale of Allington had always been known as a king. At Guestwick, the neighbouring market town, he was a great man—to be seen frequently on Saturdays, standing in the market-place, and laying down the law as to barley and oxen among men who knew usually more about barley and oxen than did he. At Hamersham, the assize town, he was generally in some repute, being a constant grand juror for the county, and a man who paid his way. But even at Hamersham the glory of the Dales had, at most periods, begun to pale, for they had seldom been widely conspicuous in the county, and had earned no great reputation by their knowledge of jurisprudence in the grand jury room. Beyond Hamersham their fame had not spread itself.

They had been men generally built in the same mould, inheriting each from his father the same virtues and the same vices,—men who would have lived, each, as his father had lived before him, had not the new ways of the world gradually drawn away with them, by an invisible magnetism, the upcoming Dale of the day,—not indeed in any case so moving him as to bring him up to the spirit of the age in which he lived, but dragging him forward to a line in advance of that on which his father had trodden. They had been obstinate men; believing much in themselves; just according to their ideas of justice; hard to their tenants—but not known to be hard even by the tenants themselves, for the rules followed had ever been the rules on the

Allington estate; imperious to their wives and children, but imperious within bounds, so that no Mrs. Dale had fled from her lord's roof, and no loud scandals had existed between father and sons; exacting in their ideas as to money, expecting that they were to receive much and to give little, and yet not thought to be mean, for they paid their way, and gave money in parish charity and in county charity. They had ever been steady supporters of the Church, graciously receiving into their parish such new vicars as, from time to time, were sent to them from King's College, Cambridge, to which establishment the gift of the living belonged;—but, nevertheless, the Dales had ever carried on some unpronounced warfare against the clergyman, so that the intercourse between the lay family and the clerical had seldom been in all respects pleasant.

Such had been the Dales of Allington, time out of mind, and such in all respects would have been the Christopher Dale of our time, had he not suffered two accidents in his youth. He had fallen in love with a lady who obstinately refused his hand, and on her account he had remained single; that was his first accident. The second had fallen upon him with reference to his father's assumed wealth. He had supposed himself to be richer than other Dales of Allington when coming in upon his property, and had consequently entertained an idea of sitting in Parliament for his county. In order that he might attain this honour he had allowed himself to be talked by the men of Hamersham and Guestwick out of his old family politics, and had declared himself a Liberal. He had never gone to the poll, and, indeed, had never actually stood for the seat. But he had come forward as a liberal politician, and had failed; and, although it was well known to all around that Christopher Dale was in heart as thoroughly conservative as any of his forefathers, this accident had made him sour and silent on the subject of politics, and had somewhat estranged him from his brother squires.

In other respects our Christopher Dale was, if anything, superior to the average of the family. Those whom he did love he loved dearly. Those whom he hated he did not ill-use beyond the limits of justice. He was close in small matters of money, and yet in certain family arrangements he was, as we shall see, capable of much liberality. He endeavoured to do his duty in accordance with his lights, and had succeeded in weaning himself from personal indulgences, to which during the early days of his high hopes he had become accustomed. And in that matter of his unrequited love he had been true throughout. In his hard, dry, unpleasant way he had loved the woman; and when at last he learned to know that she would not have his love, he had been unable to transfer his heart to another. This had happened just at the period of his father's death, and he had endeavoured to console himself with politics, with what fate we have already seen. A constant, upright, and by no means insincere man was our Christopher Dale,—thin and meagre in his mental attributes, by no means even understanding the fulness of a full man, with power of eye-sight very limited in seeing aught which was above him, but yet worthy of regard in that he had realized a path of duty and did endeavour to walk therein. And, moreover, our Mr. Christopher Dale was a gentleman.

Such in character was the squire of Allington, the only regular inhabitant of the Great House. In person, he was a plain, dry man, with short grizzled hair and thick grizzled eyebrows. Of beard, he had very little, carrying the smallest possible gray whiskers, which hardly fell below the points of his ears. His eyes were sharp and expressive, and his nose was straight and well formed,—as was also his chin. But the nobility of his face was destroyed by a mean mouth with thin lips; and his forehead, which was high and narrow, though it forbad you to take Mr. Dale for a fool, forbad you also to take him for a man of great parts, or of a wide capacity. In height, he was about five feet ten; and at the time of our story was as near to

seventy as he was to sixty. But years had treated him very lightly, and he bore few signs of age. Such in person was Christopher Dale, Esq., the squire of Allington, and owner of some three thousand a year, all of which proceeded from the lands of that parish.

And now I will speak of the Great House of Allington. After all, it was not very great; nor was it surrounded by much of that exquisite nobility of park appurtenance which graces the habitations of most of our old landed proprietors. But the house itself was very graceful. It had been built in the days of the early Stuarts, in that style of architecture to which we give the name of the Tudors. On its front it showed three pointed roofs, or gables, as I believe they should be called; and between each gable a thin tall chimney stood, the two chimneys thus raising themselves just above the three peaks I have mentioned. I think that the beauty of the house depended much on those two chimneys; on them, and on the mullioned windows with which the front of the house was closely filled. The door, with its jutting porch, was by no means in the centre of the house. As you entered, there was but one window on your right hand, while on your left there were three. And over these there was a line of five windows, one taking its place above the porch. We all know the beautiful old Tudor window, with its stout stone mullions and its stone transoms, crossing from side to side at a point much nearer to the top than to the bottom. Of all windows ever invented it is the sweetest. And here, at Allington, I think their beauty was enhanced by the fact that they were not regular in their shape. Some of these windows were long windows, while some of them were high. That to the right of the door, and that at the other extremity of the house, were among the former. But the others had been put in without regard to uniformity, a long window here, and a high window there, with a general effect which could hardly have been improved. Then above, in the three gables, were three other smaller apertures. But these also were

mullioned, and the entire frontage of the house was uniform in its style.

Round the house there were trim gardens, not very large, but worthy of much note in that they were so trim,—gardens with broad gravel paths, with one walk running in front of the house so broad as to be fitly called a terrace. But this, though in front of the house, was sufficiently removed from it to allow of a coach-road running inside it to the front door. The Dales of Allington had always been gardeners, and their garden was perhaps more noted in the county than any other of their properties. But outside the gardens no pretensions had been made to the grandeur of a domain. The pastures round the house were but pretty fields, in which timber was abundant. There was no deer-park at Allington; and though the Allington woods were well known, they formed no portion of a whole of which the house was a part. They lay away, out of sight, a full mile from the back of the house; but not on that account of less avail for the fitting preservation of foxes.

And the house stood much too near the road for purposes of grandeur, had such purposes ever swelled the breast of any of the squires of Allington. But I fancy that our ideas of rural grandeur have altered since many of our older country seats were built. To be near the village, so as in some way to afford comfort, protection, and patronage, and perhaps also with some view to the pleasantness of neighbourhood for its own inmates, seemed to be the object of a gentleman when building his house in the old days. A solitude in the centre of a wide park is now the only site that can be recognized as eligible. No cottage must be seen, unless the cottage orné of the gardener. The village, if it cannot be abolished, must be got out of sight. The sound of the church bells is not desirable, and the road on which the profane vulgar travel by their own right must be at a distance. When some old Dale of Allington built his house, he thought differently. There stood the church and there the village, and,

pleased with such vicinity, he sat himself down close to his God and to his tenants.

As you pass along the road from Guestwick into the village you see the church near to you on your left hand; but the house is hidden from the road. As you approach the church, reaching the gate of it which is not above two hundred yards from the high road, you see the full front of the Great House. Perhaps the best view of it is from the churchyard. The lane leading up to the church ends in a gate, which is the entrance into Mr. Dale's place. There is no lodge there, and the gate generally stands open,—indeed, always does so, unless some need of cattle grazing within requires that it should be closed. But there is an inner gate, leading from the home paddock through the gardens to the house, and another inner gate, some thirty yards farther on, which will take you into the farmyard. Perhaps it is a defect at Allington that the farmyard is very close to the house. But the stables, and the strawyards, and the unwashed carts, and the lazy lingering cattle of the homestead, are screened off by a row of chestnuts, which, when in its glory of flower, in the early days of May, no other row in England can surpass in beauty. Had any one told Dale of Allington—this Dale or any former Dale—that his place wanted wood, he would have pointed with mingled pride and disdain to his belt of chestnuts.

Of the church itself I will say the fewest possible number of words. It was a church such as there are, I think, thousands in England—low, incommodious, kept with difficulty in repair, too often pervious to the wet, and yet strangely picturesque, and correct too, according to great rules of architecture. It was built with a nave and aisles, visibly in the form of a cross, though with its arms clipped down to the trunk, with a separate chancel, with a large square short tower, and with a bell-shaped spire, covered with lead and irregular in its proportions. Who does not know the low porch, the perpendicular Gothic window, the flat-roofed aisles, and the noble old gray tower of such

a church as this? As regards its interior, it was dusty; it was blocked up with high-backed ugly pews; the gallery in which the children sat at the end of the church, and in which two ancient musicians blew their bassoons, was all awry, and looked as though it would fall; the pulpit was an ugly useless edifice, as high nearly as the roof would allow, and the reading-desk under it hardly permitted the parson to keep his head free from the dangling tassels of the cushion above him. A clerk also was there beneath him, holding a third position somewhat elevated; and upon the whole things there were not quite as I would have had them. But, nevertheless, the place looked like a church, and I can hardly say so much for all the modern edifices which have been built in my days towards the glory of God. It looked like a church, and not the less so because in walking up the passage between the pews the visitor trod upon the brass plates which dignified the resting-places of the departed Dales of old.

Below the church, and between that and the village, stood the vicarage, in such position that the small garden of the vicarage stretched from the churchyard down to the backs of the village cottages. This was a pleasant residence, newly built within the last thirty years, and creditable to the ideas of comfort entertained by the rich collegiate body from which the vicars of Allington always came. Doubtless we shall in the course of our sojourn at Allington visit the vicarage now and then, but I do not know that any further detailed account of its comforts will be necessary to us.

Passing by the lane leading to the vicarage, the church, and to the house, the high road descends rapidly to a little brook which runs through the village. On the right as you descend you will have seen the "Red Lion," and will have seen no other house conspicuous in any way. At the bottom, close to the brook, is the post-office, kept surely by the crossest old woman in all those parts. Here the road passes through the water, the accommodation of a narrow wooden bridge having been afforded for those on foot. But before

passing the stream, you will see a cross street, running to the left, as had run that other lane leading to the house. Here, as this cross street rises the hill, are the best houses in the village. The baker lives here, and that respectable woman, Mrs. Frummage, who sells ribbons, and toys, and soap, and straw bonnets, with many other things too long to mention. Here, too, lives an apothecary, whom the veneration of this and neighbouring parishes has raised to the dignity of a doctor. And here also, in the smallest but prettiest cottage that can be imagined, lives Mrs. Hearn, the widow of a former vicar, on terms, however, with her neighbour the squire which I regret to say are not as friendly as they should be. Beyond this lady's modest residence, Allington Street, for so the road is called, turns suddenly round towards the church, and at the point of the turn is a pretty low iron railing with a gate, and with a covered way, which leads up to the front door of the house which stands there. I will only say here, at this fag end of a chapter, that it is the Small House at Allington. Allington Street, as I have said, turns short round towards the church at this point, and there ends at a white gate, leading into the churchyard by a second entrance.

So much it was needful that I should say of Allington Great House, of the Squire, and of the village. Of the Small House, I will speak separately in a further chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE TWO PEARLS OF ALLINGTON

"But Mr. Crosbie is only a mere clerk."

This sarcastic condemnation was spoken by Miss Lilian Dale to her sister Isabella, and referred to a gentleman with whom we shall have much concern in these pages. I do not say that Mr. Crosbie will be

our hero, seeing that that part in the drama will be cut up, as it were, into fragments. Whatever of the magnificent may be produced will be diluted and apportioned out in very moderate quantities among two or more, probably among three or four, young gentlemen —to none of whom will be vouchsafed the privilege of much heroic action.

"I don't know what you call a mere clerk, Lily. Mr. Fanfaron is a mere barrister, and Mr. Boyce is a mere clergyman." Mr. Boyce was the vicar of Allington, and Mr. Fanfaron was a lawyer who had made his way over to Allington during the last assizes. "You might as well say that Lord De Guest is a mere earl."

"So he is—only a mere earl. Had he ever done anything except have fat oxen, one wouldn't say so. You know what I mean by a mere clerk? It isn't much in a man to be in a public office, and yet Mr. Crosbie gives himself airs."

"You don't suppose that Mr. Crosbie is the same as John Eames," said Bell, who, by her tone of voice, did not seem inclined to undervalue the qualifications of Mr. Crosbie. Now John Eames was a young man from Guestwick, who had been appointed to a clerkship in the Income-tax Office, with eighty pounds a year, two years ago.

"Then Johnny Eames is a mere clerk," said Lily; "and Mr. Crosbie is—— After all, Bell, what is Mr. Crosbie, if he is not a mere clerk? Of course, he is older than John Eames; and, as he has been longer at it, I suppose he has more than eighty pounds a year."

"I am not in Mr. Crosbie's confidence. He is in the General Committee Office, I know; and, I believe, has pretty nearly the management of the whole of it. I have heard Bernard say that he has six or seven young men under him, and that——; but, of course, I don't know what he does at his office."

"I'll tell you what he is, Bell; Mr. Crosbie is a swell." And Lilian Dale was right; Mr. Crosbie was a swell.

And here I may perhaps best explain who Bernard was, and who was Mr. Crosbie. Captain Bernard Dale was an officer in the corps of Engineers, was the first cousin of the two girls who have been speaking, and was nephew and heir presumptive to the squire. His father, Colonel Dale, and his mother, Lady Fanny Dale, were still living at Torquay—an effete, invalid, listless couple, pretty well dead to all the world beyond the region of the Torquay card-tables. He it was who had made for himself quite a career in the Nineteenth Dragoons. This he did by eloping with the penniless daughter of that impoverished earl, the Lord De Guest. After the conclusion of that event circumstances had not afforded him the opportunity of making himself conspicuous; and he had gone on declining gradually in the world's esteem—for the world had esteemed him when he first made good his running with the Lady Fanny—till now, in his slippered years, he and his Lady Fanny were unknown except among those Torquay Bath chairs and card-tables. His elder brother was still a hearty man, walking in thick shoes, and constant in his saddle; but the colonel, with nothing beyond his wife's title to keep his body awake, had fallen asleep somewhat prematurely among his slippers. Of him and of Lady Fanny, Bernard Dale was the only son. Daughters they had had; some were dead, some married, and one living with them among the card-tables. Of his parents Bernard had latterly not seen much; not more, that is, than duty and a due attention to the fifth commandment required of him. He also was making a career for himself, having obtained a commission in the Engineers, and being known to all his compeers as the nephew of an earl, and as the heir to a property of three thousand a year. And when I say that Bernard Dale was not inclined to throw away any of these advantages, I by no means intend to speak in his dispraise. The advantage of being heir to a good property is so manifest—the advantages over and beyond those which are merely fiscal—that no man

thinks of throwing them away, or expects another man to do so. Moneys in possession or in expectation do give a set to the head, and a confidence to the voice, and an assurance to the man, which will help him much in his walk in life—if the owner of them will simply use them, and not abuse them. And for Bernard Dale I will say that he did not often talk of his uncle the earl. He was conscious that his uncle was an earl, and that other men knew the fact. He knew that he would not otherwise have been elected at the Beaufort, or at that most aristocratic of little clubs called Sebright's. When noble blood was called in question he never alluded specially to his own, but he knew how to speak as one of whom all the world was aware on which side he had been placed by the circumstances of his birth. Thus he used his advantage, and did not abuse it. And in his profession he had been equally fortunate. By industry, by a small but wakeful intelligence, and by some aid from patronage, he had got on till he had almost achieved the reputation of talent. His name had become known among scientific experimentalists, not as that of one who had himself invented a cannon or an antidote to a cannon, but as of a man understanding in cannons and well fitted to look at those invented by others; who would honestly test this or that antidote; or, if not honestly, seeing that such thin-minded men can hardly go to the proof of any matter without some pre-judgment in their minds, at any rate with such appearance of honesty that the world might be satisfied. And in this way Captain Dale was employed much at home, about London; and was not called on to build barracks in Nova Scotia, or to make roads in the Punjaub.

He was a small slight man, smaller than his uncle, but in face very like him. He had the same eyes, and nose, and chin, and the same mouth; but his forehead was better,—less high and pointed, and better formed about the brows. And then he wore moustaches, which somewhat hid the thinness of his mouth. On the whole, he was not ill-looking; and, as I have said

before, he carried with him an air of self-assurance and a confident balance, which in itself gives a grace to a young man.

He was staying at the present time in his uncle's house, during the delicious warmth of the summer,—for, as yet, the month of July was not all past; and his intimate friend, Adolphus Crosbie, who was or was not a mere clerk as my readers may choose to form their own opinions on that matter, was a guest in the house with him. I am inclined to say that Adolphus Crosbie was not a mere clerk; and I do not think that he would have been so called, even by Lily Dale, had he not given signs to her that he was a "swell." Now a man in becoming a swell,—a swell of such an order as could possibly be known to Lily Dale,—must have ceased to be a mere clerk in that very process. And, moreover, Captain Dale would not have been Damon to any Pythias, of whom it might fairly be said that he was a mere clerk. Nor could any mere clerk have got himself in either at the Beaufort or at Sebright's. The evidence against that former assertion made by Lily Dale is very strong; but then the evidence as to her latter assertion is as strong. Mr. Crosbie certainly was a swell. It is true that he was a clerk in the General Committee Office. But then, in the first place, the General Committee Office is situated in Whitehall; whereas poor John Eames was forced to travel daily from his lodgings in Burton Crescent, ever so far beyond Russell Square, to his dingy room in Somerset House. And Adolphus Crosbie, when very young, had been a private secretary, and had afterwards mounted up in his office to some quasi authority and senior-clerkship, bringing him in seven hundred a year, and giving a status among assistant secretaries and the like, which even in an official point of view was something. But the triumphs of Adolphus Crosbie had been other than these. Not because he had been intimate with assistant secretaries, and was allowed in Whitehall a room to himself with an arm-chair, would he have been entitled to stand upon the rug at Sebright's and

speak while rich men listened,—rich men, and men also who had handles to their names! Adolphus Crosbie had done more than make minutes with discretion on the papers of the General Committee Office. He had set himself down before the gates of the city of fashion, and had taken them by storm; or, perhaps, to speak with more propriety, he had picked the locks and let himself in. In his walks of life he was somebody in London. A man at the West End who did not know who was Adolphus Crosbie knew nothing. I do not say that he was the intimate friend of many great men; but even great men acknowledged the acquaintance of Adolphus Crosbie, and he was to be seen in the drawing-rooms, or at any rate on the staircases, of Cabinet Ministers.

Lilian Dale, dear Lily Dale—for my reader must know that she is to be very dear, and that my story will be nothing to him if he do not love Lily Dale—Lilian Dale had discovered that Mr. Crosbie was a swell. But I am bound to say that Mr. Crosbie did not habitually proclaim the fact in any offensive manner; nor in becoming a swell had he become altogether a bad fellow. It was not to be expected that a man who was petted at Sebright's should carry himself in the Allington drawing-room as would Johnny Eames, who had never been petted by any one but his mother. And this fraction of a hero of ours had other advantages to back him, over and beyond those which fashion had given him. He was a tall, well-looking man, with pleasant eyes and an expressive mouth,—a man whom you would probably observe in whatever room you might meet him. And he knew how to talk, and had in him something which justified talking. He was no butterfly or dandy, who flew about in the world's sun, warmed into prettiness by a sunbeam. Crosbie had his opinion on things,—on politics, on religion, on the philanthropic tendencies of the age, and had read something here and there as he formed his opinion. Perhaps he might have done better in the world had he not been placed so early in life in that Whitehall

public office. There was that in him which might have earned better bread for him in an open profession.

But in that matter of his bread the fate of Adolphus Crosbie had by this time been decided for him, and he had reconciled himself to fate that was now inexorable. Some very slight patrimony, a hundred a year or so, had fallen to his share. Beyond that he had his salary from his office, and nothing else; and on his income, thus made up, he had lived as a bachelor in London, enjoying all that London could give him as a man in moderately easy circumstances, and looking forward to no costly luxuries,—such as a wife, a house of his own, or a stable full of horses. Those which he did enjoy of the good things of the world would, if known to John Eames, have made him appear fabulously rich in the eyes of that brother clerk. His lodgings in Mount Street were elegant in their belongings. During three months of the season in London he called himself the master of a very neat hack. He was always well dressed, though never over-dressed. At his clubs he could live on equal terms with men having ten times his income. He was not married. He had acknowledged to himself that he could not marry without money; and he would not marry for money. He had put aside from him, as not within his reach, the comforts of marriage. But—— We will not, however, at the present moment inquire more curiously into the private life and circumstances of our new friend Adolphus Crosbie.

After the sentence pronounced against him by Lilian, the two girls remained silent for awhile. Bell was, perhaps, a little angry with her sister. It was not often that she allowed herself to say much in praise of any gentleman; and, now that she had spoken a word or two in favour of Mr. Crosbie, she felt herself to be rebuked by her sister for this unwonted enthusiasm. Lily was at work on a drawing, and in a minute or two had forgotten all about Mr. Crosbie; but the injury remained on Bell's mind, and prompted her to go back to the subject. "I don't like those slang words, Lily."

"What slang words?"

"You know what you called Bernard's friend."

"Oh; a swell. I fancy I do like slang. I think it's awfully jolly to talk about things being jolly. Only that I was afraid of your nerves I should have called him stunning. It's so slow, you know, to use nothing but words out of a dictionary."

"I don't think it's nice in talking of gentlemen."

"Isn't it? Well, I'd like to be nice—if I knew how."

If she knew how! There is no knowing how, for a girl, in that matter. If nature and her mother have not done it for her, there is no hope for her on that head. I think I may say that nature and her mother had been sufficiently efficacious for Lilian Dale in this respect.

"Mr. Crosbie is, at any rate, a gentleman, and knows how to make himself pleasant. That was all that I meant. Mamma said a great deal more about him than I did."

"Mr. Crosbie is an Apollo; and I always look upon Apollo as the greatest—you know what—that ever lived. I mustn't say the word, because Apollo was a gentleman."

At this moment, while the name of the god was still on her lips, the high open window of the drawing-room was darkened, and Bernard entered, followed by Mr. Crosbie.

"Who is talking about Apollo?" said Captain Dale.

The girls were both stricken dumb. How would it be with them if Mr. Crosbie had heard himself spoken of in those last words of poor Lily's? This was the rashness of which Bell was ever accusing her sister, and here was the result! But, in truth, Bernard had heard nothing more than the name, and Mr. Crosbie, who had been behind him, had heard nothing.

"'As sweet and musical as bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair,'" said Mr. Crosbie, not meaning much by the quotation, but perceiving that the two girls had been in some way put out and silenced.

"What very bad music it must have made," said Lily; "unless, indeed, his hair was very different from ours."

"It was all sunbeams," suggested Bernard. But by that time Apollo had served his turn, and the ladies welcomed their guests in the proper form.

"Mamma is in the garden," said Bell, with that hypocritical pretence so common with young ladies when young gentlemen call; as though they were aware that mamma was the object specially sought.

"Picking peas, with a sun bonnet on," said Lily.

"Let us by all means go and help her," said Mr. Crosbie; and then they issued out into the garden.

The gardens of the Great House of Allington and those of the Small House open on to each other. A proper boundary of thick laurel hedge, and wide ditch, and of iron spikes guarding the ditch, there is between them; but over the wide ditch there is a foot-bridge, and at the bridge there is a gate which has no key; and for all purposes of enjoyment the gardens of each house are open to the other. And the gardens of the Small House are very pretty. The Small House itself is so near the road that there is nothing between the dining-room windows and the iron rail but a narrow edge rather than border, and a little path made with round fixed cobble stones, not above two feet broad, into which no one but the gardener ever makes his way. The distance from the road to the house is not above five or six feet, and the entrance from the gate is shut in by a covered way. But the garden behind the house, on to which the windows from the drawing-room open, is to all the senses as private as though there were no village of Allington, and no road up to the church within a hundred yards of the lawn. The steeple of the church, indeed, can be seen from the lawn, peering, as it were, between the yew-trees which stand in the corner of the churchyard adjoining to Mrs. Dale's wall. But none of the Dale family have any objection to the sight of that steeple. The glory of the Small House at Allington certainly consists in its

lawn, which is as smooth, as level, and as much like velvet as grass has ever yet been made to look. Lily Dale, taking pride in her own lawn, has declared often that it is no good attempting to play croquet up at the Great House. The grass, she says, grows in tufts, and nothing that Hopkins, the gardener, can or will do has any effect upon the tufts. But there are no tufts at the Small House. As the squire himself has never been very enthusiastic about croquet, the croquet implements have been moved permanently down to the Small House, and croquet there has become quite an institution.

And while I am on the subject of the garden I may also mention Mrs. Dale's conservatory, as to which Bell was strenuously of opinion that the Great House had nothing to offer equal to it—"For flowers, of course, I mean," she would say, correcting herself; for at the Great House there was a grapery very celebrated. On this matter the squire would be less tolerant than as regarded the croquet, and would tell his niece that she knew nothing about flowers. "Perhaps not, uncle Christopher," she would say. "All the same, I like our geraniums best;" for there was a spice of obstinacy about Miss Dale,—as, indeed, there was in all the Dales, male and female, young and old.

It may be as well to explain that the care of this lawn and of this conservatory, and, indeed, of the entire garden belonging to the Small House, was in the hands of Hopkins, the head gardener to the Great House; and it was so simply for this reason, that Mrs. Dale could not afford to keep a gardener herself. A working lad, at ten shillings a week, who cleaned the knives and shoes, and dug the ground, was the only male attendant on the three ladies. But Hopkins, the head gardener of Allington, who had men under him, was as widely awake to the lawn and the conservatory of the humbler establishment as he was to the grapery, peach-walls, and terraces of the grander one. In his eyes it was all one place. The Small House belonged to his master, as indeed did the very furniture within

it; and it was lent, not let, to Mrs. Dale. Hopkins, perhaps, did not love Mrs. Dale, seeing that he owed her no duty as one born a Dale. The two young ladies he did love, and also snubbed in a very peremptory way sometimes. To Mrs. Dale he was coldly civil, always referring to the squire if any direction worthy of special notice as concerning the garden was given to him.

All this will serve to explain the terms on which Mrs. Dale was living at the Small House,—a matter needful of explanation sooner or later. Her husband had been the youngest of three brothers, and in many respects the brightest. Early in life he had gone up to London, and there had done well as a land surveyor. He had done so well that Government had employed him, and for some three or four years he had enjoyed a large income, but death had come suddenly on him, while he was only yet ascending the ladder; and when he died he had hardly begun to realize the golden prospects which he had seen before him. This had happened some fifteen years before our story commenced, so that the two girls hardly retained any memory of their father. For the first five years of her widowhood, Mrs. Dale, who had never been a favourite of the squire's, lived with her two little girls in such modest way as her very limited means allowed. Old Mrs. Dale, the squire's mother, then occupied the Small House. But when old Mrs. Dale died, the squire offered the place rent-free to his sister-in-law, intimating to her that her daughters would obtain considerable social advantages by living at Allington. She had accepted the offer, and the social advantages had certainly followed. Mrs. Dale was poor, her whole income not exceeding three hundred a year, and therefore her own style of living was of necessity very unassuming; but she saw her girls becoming popular in the county, much liked by the families around them, and enjoying nearly all the advantages which would have accrued to them had they been the daughters of Squire Dale of Allington. Under such circumstances

it was little to her whether or no she were loved by her brother-in-law, or respected by Hopkins. Her own girls loved her, and respected her, and that was pretty much all that she demanded of the world on her own behalf.

And uncle Christopher had been very good to the girls in his own obstinate and somewhat ungracious manner. There were two ponies in the stables of the Great House, which they were allowed to ride, and which, unless on occasions, nobody else did ride. I think he might have given the ponies to the girls, but he thought differently. And he contributed to their dresses, sending them home now and again things which he thought necessary, not in the pleasantest way in the world. Money he never gave them, nor did he make them any promises. But they were Dales, and he loved them; and with Christopher Dale to love once was to love always. Bell was his chief favourite, sharing with his nephew Bernard the best warmth of his heart. About these two he had his projects, intending that Bell should be the future mistress of the Great House of Allington; as to which project, however, Miss Dale was as yet in very absolute ignorance.

We may now, I think, go back to our four friends, as they walked out upon the lawn. They were understood to be on a mission to assist Mrs. Dale in the picking of the peas; but pleasure intervened in the way of business, and the young people, forgetting the labours of their elder, allowed themselves to be carried away by the fascinations of croquet. The iron hoops and the sticks were fixed. The mallets and the balls were lying about; and then the party was so nicely made up! "I haven't had a game of croquet yet," said Mr. Crosbie. It cannot be said that he had lost much time, seeing that he had only arrived before dinner on the preceding day. And then the mallets were in their hands in a moment.

"We'll play sides, of course," said Lily. "Bernard and I'll play together." But this was not allowed.

Lily was well known to be the queen of the croquet ground; and as Bernard was supposed to be more efficient than his friend, Lily had to take Mr. Crosbie as her partner. "Apollo can't get through the hoops," Lily said afterwards to her sister; "but then how gracefully he fails to do it!" Lily, however, had been beaten, and may therefore be excused for a little spite against her partner. But it so turned out that before Mr. Crosbie took his final departure from Allington he could get through the hoops; and Lily, though she was still queen of the croquet ground, had to acknowledge a male sovereign in that dominion.

"That's not the way we played at——," said Crosbie, at one point of the game, and then stopped himself.

"Where was that?" said Bernard.

"A place I was at last summer,—in Shropshire."

"Then they don't play the game, Mr. Crosbie, at the place you were at last summer,—in Shropshire," said Lily.

"You mean Lady Hartletop's," said Bernard. Now, the Marchioness of Hartletop was a very great person indeed, and a leader in the fashionable world.

"Oh! Lady Hartletop's!" said Lily. "Then I suppose we must give in;" which little bit of sarcasm was not lost upon Mr. Crosbie, and was put down by him in the tablets of his mind as quite undeserved. He had endeavoured to avoid any mention of Lady Hartletop and her croquet ground, and her ladyship's name had been forced upon him. Nevertheless, he liked Lily Dale through it all. But the thought that he liked Bell the best, though she said little; for Bell was the beauty of the family.

During the game Bernard remembered that they had especially come over to bid the three ladies to dinner at the house on that day. They had all dined there on the day before, and the girls' uncle had now sent directions to them to come again. "I'll go and ask mamma about it," said Bell, who was out first. And

then she returned, saying, that she and her sister would obey their uncle's behest; but that her mother would prefer to remain at home. "There are the peas to be eaten, you know," said Lily.

"Send them up to the Great House," said Bernard.

"Hopkins would not allow it," said Lily. "He calls that a mixing of things. Hopkins doesn't like mixings." And then when the game was over, they sauntered about, out of the small garden into the larger one, and through the shrubberies, and out upon the fields, where they found the still lingering remnants of the haymaking. And Lily took a rake, and raked for two minutes; and Mr. Crosbie, making an attempt to pitch the hay into the cart, had to pay half-a-crown for his footing to the haymakers; and Bell sat quiet under a tree, mindful of her complexion; whereupon Mr. Crosbie, finding the hay-pitching not much to his taste, threw himself under the same tree also, quite after the manner of Apollo, as Lily said to her mother late in the evening. Then Bernard covered Lily with hay, which was a great feat in the jocose way for him; and Lily in returning the compliment, almost smothered Mr. Crosbie,—by accident.

"Oh, Lily," said Bell.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr. Crosbie. It was Bernard's fault. Bernard, I never will come into a hayfield with you again." And so they all became very intimate; while Bell sat quietly under the tree, listening to a word or two now and then as Mr. Crosbie chose to speak them. There is a kind of enjoyment to be had in society, in which very few words are necessary. Bell was less vivacious than her sister Lily; and when, an hour after this, she was dressing herself for dinner, she acknowledged that she had passed a pleasant afternoon, though Mr. Crosbie had not said very much.

CHAPTER III

THE WIDOW DALE OF ALLINGTON

As Mrs. Dale, of the Small House, was not a Dale by birth, there can be no necessity for insisting on the fact that none of the Dale peculiarities should be sought for in her character. These peculiarities were not, perhaps, very conspicuous in her daughters, who had taken more in that respect from their mother than from their father; but a close observer might recognize the girls as Dales. They were constant, perhaps obstinate, occasionally a little uncharitable in their judgment, and prone to think that there was a great deal in being a Dale, though not prone to say much about it. But they had also a better pride than this, which had come to them as their mother's heritage.

Mrs. Dale was certainly a proud woman,—not that there was anything appertaining to herself in which she took a pride. In birth she had been much lower than her husband, seeing that her grandfather had been almost nobody. Her fortune had been considerable for her rank in life, and on its proceeds she now mainly depended; but it had not been sufficient to give any of the pride of wealth. And she had been a beauty; according to my taste, was still very lovely; but certainly at this time of life, she, a widow of fifteen years' standing, with two grown-up daughters, took no pride in her beauty. Nor had she any conscious pride in the fact that she was a lady. That she was a lady, inwards and outwards, from the crown of her head to the sole of her feet, in head, in heart, and in mind, a lady by education and a lady by nature, a lady also by birth in spite of that deficiency respecting her grandfather, I hereby state as a fact—meo periculo. And the squire, though he had no special love for her, had recognized this, and in all respects treated her as his equal.

But her position was one which required that she should either be very proud or else very humble. She was poor, and yet her daughters moved in a position which belongs, as a rule, to the daughters of rich men only. This they did as nieces of the childless squire of Allington, and as his nieces she felt that they were entitled to accept his countenance and kindness, without loss of self-respect either to her or to them. She would have ill done her duty as a mother to them had she allowed any pride of her own to come between them and such advantage in the world as their uncle might be able to give them. On their behalf she had accepted the loan of the house in which she lived, and the use of many of the appurtenances belonging to her brother-in-law; but on her own account she had accepted nothing. Her marriage with Philip Dale had been disliked by his brother the squire, and the squire, while Philip was still living, had continued to show that his feelings in this respect were not to be overcome. They never had been overcome; and now, though the brother-in-law and sister-in-law had been close neighbours for years, living as one may say almost in the same family, they had never become friends. There had not been a word of quarrel between them. They met constantly. The squire had unconsciously come to entertain a profound respect for his brother's widow. The widow had acknowledged to herself the truth of the affection shown by the uncle to her daughters. But yet they had never come together as friends. Of her own money matters Mrs. Dale had never spoken a word to the squire. Of his intention respecting the girls the squire had never spoken a word to the mother. And in this way they had lived and were living at Allington.

The life which Mrs. Dale led was not altogether an easy life,—was not devoid of much painful effort on her part. The theory of her life one may say was this—that she should bury herself in order that her daughters might live well above ground. And in order to carry out this theory, it was necessary that

she should abstain from all complaint or show of uneasiness before her girls. Their life above ground would not be well if they understood that their mother, in this underground life of hers, was enduring any sacrifice on their behalf. It was needful that they should think that the picking of peas in a sun bonnet, or long readings by her own fire-side, and solitary hours spent in thinking, were specially to her mind. "Mamma doesn't like going out." "I don't think mamma is happy anywhere out of her own drawing-room." I do not say that the girls were taught to say such words, but they were taught to have thoughts which led to such words, and in the early days of their going out into the world used so to speak of their mother. But a time came to them before long,—to one first and then to the other,—in which they knew that it was not so, and knew also all that their mother had suffered for their sakes.

And in truth Mrs. Dale could have been as young in heart as they were. She, too, could have played croquet, and have coquetted with a haymaker's rake, and have delighted in her pony, ay, and have listened to little nothings from this and that Apollo, had she thought that things had been conformable thereto. Women at forty do not become ancient misanthropes, or stern Rhadamanthine moralists, indifferent to the world's pleasures—no, not even though they be widows. There are those who think that such should be the phase of their minds. I profess that I do not so think. I would have women, and men also, young as long as they can be young. It is not that a woman should call herself in years younger than her father's Family Bible will have her to be. Let her who is forty call herself forty; but if she can be young in spirit at forty, let her show that she is so.

I think that Mrs. Dale was wrong. She would have joined that party on the croquet ground, instead of remaining among the pea-sticks in her sun bonnet, had she done as I would have counselled her. Not a word was spoken among the four that she did not

hear. Those pea-sticks were only removed from the lawn by a low wall and a few shrubs. She listened, not as one suspecting, but simply as one loving. The voices of her girls were very dear to her, and the silver ringing tones of Lily's tongue were as sweet to her ears as the music of the gods. She heard all that about Lady Hartletop, and shuddered at Lily's bold sarcasm. And she heard Lily say that mamma would stay at home and eat the peas, and said to herself sadly that that was now her lot in life.

"Dear darling girl,—and so it should be!"

It was thus her thoughts ran. And then, when her ear had traced them, as they passed across the little bridge into the other grounds, she returned across the lawn to the house with her burden on her arm, and sat herself down on the step of the drawing-room window, looking out on the sweet summer flowers and the smooth surface of the grass before her.

Had not God done well for her to place her where she was? Had not her lines been set for her in pleasant places? Was she not happy in her girls,—her sweet, loving, trusting, trusty children? As it was to be that her lord, that best half of herself, was to be taken from her in early life, and that the springs of all the lighter pleasures were to be thus stopped for her, had it not been well that in her bereavement so much had been done to soften her lot in life and give it grace and beauty? 'Twas so, she argued with herself, and yet she acknowledged to herself that she was not happy. She had resolved, as she herself had said often, to put away childish things, and now she pined for those things which she so put from her. As she sat she could still hear Lily's voice as they went through the shrubbery,—hear it when none but a mother's ears would have distinguished the sound. Now that those young men were at the Great House it was natural that her girls should be there too. The squire would not have had young men to stay with him had there been no ladies to grace his table. But for her,—she knew that no one would

want her there. Now and again she must go, as otherwise her very existence, without going, would be a thing disagreeably noticeable. But there was no other reason why she should join the party; nor in joining it would she either give or receive pleasure. Let her daughters eat from her brother's table and drink of his cup. They were made welcome to do so from the heart. For her there was no such welcome as that at the Great House,—nor at any other house, or any other table!

"Mamma will stay at home to eat the peas."

And then she repeated to herself the words which Lily had spoken, sitting there, leaning with her elbow on her knee, and her head upon her hand.

"Please, ma'am, cook says, can we have the peas to shell?" and then her reverie was broken.

Whereupon Mrs. Dale got up and gave over her basket. "Cook knows that the young ladies are going to dine at the Great House?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"She needn't mind getting dinner for me. I will have tea early." And so, after all, Mrs. Dale did not perform that special duty appointed for her.

But she soon set herself to work upon another duty. When a family of three persons has to live upon an income of three hundred a year, and, nevertheless, makes some pretence of going into society, it has to be very mindful of small details, even though that family may consist only of ladies. Of this Mrs. Dale was well aware, and as it pleased her that her daughters should be nice and fresh, and pretty in their attire, many a long hour was given up to that care. The squire would send them shawls in winter, and had given them riding habits, and had sent them down brown silk dresses from London,—so limited in quantity that the due manufacture of two dresses out of the material had been found to be beyond the art of woman, and the brown silk garments had been a difficulty from that day to this,—the squire having a good memory in such matters and being anxious to

see the fruits of his liberality. All this was doubtless of assistance, but had the squire given the amount which he so expended in money to his nieces, the benefit would have been greater. As it was, the girls were always nice and fresh and pretty, they themselves not being idle in that matter; but their tire-woman in chief was their mother. And now she went up to their room and got out their muslin frocks, and—but, perhaps, I should not tell such tales!—She, however, felt no shame in her work, as she sent for a hot iron, and with her own hands smoothed out the creases, and gave the proper set to the crimp flounces, and fixed a new ribbon where it was wanted, and saw that all was as it should be. Men think but little how much of this kind is endured that their eyes may be pleased, even though it be but for an hour.

"Oh! mamma, how good you are," said Bell, as the two girls came in, only just in time to make themselves ready for returning to dinner.

"Mamma is always good," said Lily. "I wish, mamma, I could do the same for you oftener," and then she kissed her mother. But the squire was exact about dinner, so they dressed themselves in haste, and went off again through the garden, their mother accompanying them to the little bridge.

"Your uncle did not seem vexed at my not coming?" said Mrs. Dale.

"We have not seen him, mamma," said Lily. "We have been ever so far down the fields, and forgot altogether what o'clock it was."

"I don't think Uncle Christopher was about the place, or we should have met him," said Bell.

"But I am vexed with you, mamma. Are not you, Bell? It is very bad of you to stay here all alone, and not come."

"I suppose mamma likes being at home better than up at the Great House," said Bell, very gently; and as she spoke she was holding her mother's hand.

"Well; good-by, dears. I shall expect you between ten and eleven. But don't hurry yourselves if any-

thing is going on." And so they went, and the widow was again alone. The path from the bridge ran straight up towards the back of the Great House, so that for a moment or two she could see them as they tripped on almost in a run. And then she saw their dresses flutter as they turned sharp round, up the terrace steps. She would not go beyond the nook among the laurels by which she was surrounded, lest any one should see her as she looked after her girls. But when the last flutter of the pink muslin had been whisked away from her sight, she felt it hard that she might not follow them. She stood there, however, without advancing a step. She would not have Hopkins telling how she watched her daughters as they went from her own home to that of her brother-in-law. It was not within the capacity of Hopkins to understand why she watched them.

"Well, girls, you're not much too soon. I think your mother might have come with you," said uncle Christopher. And this was the manner of the man. Had he known his own wishes he must have acknowledged to himself that he was better pleased that Mrs. Dale should stay away. He felt himself more absolutely master and more comfortably at home at his own table without her company than with it. And yet he frequently made a grievance of her not coming, and himself believed in that grievance.

"I think mamma was tired," said Bell.

"Hem. It's not so very far across from one house to the other. If I were to shut myself up whenever I'm tired—— But never mind. Let's go to dinner. Mr. Crosbie, will you take my niece Lilian?" And then, offering his own arm to Bell, he walked off to the dining-room.

"If he scolds mamma any more, I'll go away," said Lily to her companion; by which it may be seen that they had all become very intimate during the long day that they had passed together.

Mrs. Dale, after remaining for a moment on the bridge, went in to her tea. What succedaneum of

mutton chop or broiled ham she had for the roast duck and green peas which were to have been provided for the family dinner we will not particularly inquire. We may, however, imagine that she did not devote herself to her evening repast with any peculiar energy of appetite. She took a book with her as she sat herself down,—some novel, probably, for Mrs. Dale was not above novels,—and read a page or two as she sipped her tea. But the book was soon laid on one side, and the tray on which the warm plate had become cold was neglected, and she threw herself back in her own familiar chair, thinking of herself, and of her girls, and thinking also what might have been her lot in life had he lived who had loved her truly during the few years that they had been together.

It is especially the nature of a Dale to be constant in his likings and his dislikings. Her husband's affection for her had been unswerving,—so much so that he had quarrelled with his brother because his brother would not express himself in brotherly terms about his wife; but, nevertheless, the two brothers had loved each other always. Many years had now gone by since these things had occurred, but still the same feelings remained. When she had first come down to Allington she had resolved to win the squire's regard, but she had now long known that any such winning was out of the question; indeed, there was no longer a wish for it. Mrs. Dale was not one of those soft-hearted women who sometimes thank God that they can love any one. She could once have felt affection for her brother-in-law,—affection, and close, careful, sisterly friendship; but she could not do so now. He had been cold to her, and had with perseverance rejected her advances. That was now seven years since; and during those years Mrs. Dale had been, at any rate, as cold to him as he had been to her.

But all this was very hard to bear. That her daughters should love their uncle was not only reasonable, but in every way desirable. He was not cold to

them. To them he was generous and affectionate. If she were only out of the way, he would have taken them to his house as his own, and they would in all respects have stood before the world as his adopted children. Would it not be better if she were out of the way?

It was only in her most dismal moods that this question would get itself asked within her mind, and then she would recover herself, and answer it stoutly with an indignant protest against her own morbid weakness. It would not be well that she should be away from her girls,—not though their uncle should have been twice a better uncle; not though, by her absence, they might become heiresses of all Allington. Was it not above everything to them that they should have a mother near them? And as she asked of herself that morbid question,—wickedly asked it, as she declared to herself,—did she not know that they loved her better than all the world beside, and would prefer her caresses and her care to the guardianship of any uncle, let his house be ever so great? As yet they loved her better than all the world beside. Of other love, should it come, she would not be jealous. And if it should come, and should be happy, might there not yet be a bright evening of life for herself? If they should marry, and if their lords would accept her love, her friendship, and her homage, she might yet escape from the death-like coldness of that Great House, and be happy in some tiny cottage, from which she might go forth at times among those who would really welcome her. A certain doctor there was, living not very far from Allington, at Guestwick, as to whom she had once thought that he might fill that place of son-in-law,—to be well-beloved. Her quiet, beautiful Bell had seemed to like the man; and he had certainly done more than seem to like her. But now, for some weeks past, this hope, or rather this idea, had faded away. Mrs. Dale had never questioned her daughter on the matter; she was not a woman prone to put such questions. But during the month or two last

past, she had seen with regret that Bell looked almost coldly on the man whom her mother favoured.

In thinking of all this the long evening passed away, and at eleven o'clock she heard the coming steps across the garden. The young men had, of course, accompanied the girls home; and as she stepped out from the still open window of her own drawing-room, she saw them all on the centre of the lawn before her.

"There's mamma," said Lily. "Mamma, Mr. Crosbie wants to play croquet by moonlight."

"I don't think there is light enough for that," said Mrs. Dale.

"There is light enough for him," said Lily, "for he plays quite independently of the hoops; don't you, Mr. Crosbie?"

"There's very pretty croquet light, I should say," said Mr. Crosbie, looking up at the bright moon; "and then it is so stupid going to bed."

"Yes, it is stupid going to bed," said Lily; "but people in the country are stupid, you know. Billiards, that you can play all night by gas, is much better, isn't it?"

"Your arrows fall terribly astray there, Miss Dale, for I never touch a cue; you should talk to your cousin about billiards."

"Is Bernard a great billiard player?" asked Bell.

"Well, I do play now and again; about as well as Crosbie does croquet. Come, Crosbie, we'll go home and smoke a cigar."

"Yes," said Lily; "and then, you know, we stupid people can go to bed. Mamma, I wish you had a little smoking-room here for us. I don't like being considered stupid." And then they parted,—the ladies going into the house, and the two men returning across the lawn.

"Lily, my love," said Mrs. Dale, when they were all together in her bedroom, "it seems to me that you are very hard upon Mr. Crosbie."

"She has been going on like that all the evening," said Bell.

"I'm sure we are very good friends," said Lily.

"Oh, very," said Bell.

"Now, Bell, you're jealous; you know you are." And then, seeing that her sister was in some slight degree vexed, she went up to her and kissed her. "She shan't be called jealous; shall she, mamma?"

"I don't think she deserves it," said Mrs. Dale.

"Now, you don't mean to say that you think I meant anything," said Lily. "As if I cared a buttercup about Mr. Crosbie."

"Or I either, Lily."

"Of course, you don't. But I do care for him very much, mamma. He is such a duck of an Apollo. I shall always call him Apollo; Phœbus Apollo! And when I draw his picture he shall have a mallet in his hand instead of a bow. Upon my word I am very much obliged to Bernard for bringing him down here; and I do wish he was not going away the day after to-morrow."

"The day after to-morrow!" said Mrs. Dale. "It was hardly worth coming for two days."

"No, it wasn't,—disturbing us all in our quiet little ways just for such a spell as that,—not giving one time even to count his rays."

"But he says he shall perhaps come again," said Bell.

"There is that hope for us," said Lily. "Uncle Christopher asked him to come down when he gets his long leave of absence. This is only a short sort of leave. He is better off than poor Johnny Eames. Johnny Eames only has a month, but Mr. Crosbie has two months just whenever he likes it; and seems to be pretty much his own master all the year round besides."

"And uncle Christopher asked him to come down for the shooting in September," said Bell.

"And though he didn't say he'd come I think he meant it," said Lily. "There is that hope for us, mamma."

"Then you'll have to draw Apollo with a gun instead of a mallet."

"That is the worst of it, mamma. We shan't see much of him or of Bernard either. They wouldn't let us go out into the woods as beaters, would they?"

"You'd make too much noise to be of any use."

"Should I? I thought the beaters had to shout at the birds. I should get very tired of shouting at birds, so I think I'll stay at home and look after my clothes."

"I hope he will come, because uncle Christopher seems to like him so much," said Bell.

"I wonder whether a certain gentleman at Guestwick will like his coming," said Lily. And then, as soon as she had spoken the words, she looked at her sister, and saw that she had grieved her.

"Lily, you let your tongue run too fast," said Mrs. Dale.

"I didn't mean anything, Bell," said Lily. "I beg your pardon."

"It doesn't signify," said Bell. "Only Lily says things without thinking." And then that conversation came to an end, and nothing more was said among them beyond what appertained to their toilet, and a few last words at parting. But the two girls occupied the same room, and when their own door was closed upon them, Bell did allude to what had passed with some spirit.

"Lily, you promised me," she said, "that you would not say anything more to me about Dr. Crofts."

"I know I did, and I was very wrong. I beg your pardon, Bell; and I won't do it again,—not if I can help it."

"Not help it, Lily!"

"But I'm sure I don't know why I shouldn't speak of him,—only not in the way of laughing at you. Of all the men I ever saw in my life I like him best. And only that I love you better than I love myself I could find it in my heart to grudge you his——"

"Lily, what did you promise just now?"

"Well; after to-night. And I don't know why you should turn against him."

"I have never turned against him or for him."

"There's no turning about him. He'd give his left hand if you'd only smile on him. Or his right either, —and that's what I should like to see; so now you've heard it."

"You know you are talking nonsense."

"So I should like to see it. And so would mamma too, I'm sure; though I never heard her say a word about him. In my mind he's the finest fellow I ever saw. What's Mr. Apollo Crosbie to him? And now, as it makes you unhappy, I'll never say another word about him."

As Bell wished her sister good-night with perhaps more than her usual affection, it was evident that Lily's words and eager tone had in some way pleased her, in spite of their opposition to the request which she had made. And Lily was aware that it was so.

CHAPTER IV

MRS. ROPER'S BOARDING-HOUSE

I HAVE said that John Eames had been petted by none but his mother, but I would not have it supposed, on this account, that John Eames had no friends. There is a class of young men who never get petted, though they may not be the less esteemed, or perhaps loved. They do not come forth to the world as Apollos, nor shine at all, keeping what light they may have for inward purposes. Such young men are often awkward, ungainly, and not yet formed in their gait; they straggle with their limbs, and are shy; words do not come to them with ease, when words are required, among any but their accustomed associates. Social meetings are periods of penance to them, and any appearance in public will unnerve them. They go much about alone, and blush when women speak to them. In truth, they are not as yet men, whatever the number may be of their years; and, as they are no longer boys, the world has found for them the ungraceful name of hobbledehoy.

Such observations, however, as I have been enabled to make on this matter have led me to believe that the hobbledehoy is by no means the least valuable species of the human race. When I compare the hobbledehoy of one or two and twenty to some finished Apollo of the same age, I regard the former as unripe fruit, and the latter as fruit that is ripe. Then comes the question as to the two fruits. Which is the better fruit, that which ripens early—which is, perhaps, favoured with some little forcing apparatus, or which, at least, is backed by the warmth of a southern wall; or that fruit of slower growth, as to which nature works without assistance, on which the sun operates in its own time,—or perhaps never operates if some ungenial shade has been allowed to interpose itself? The world, no doubt, is in favour of the forcing apparatus or of the southern wall. The fruit comes certainly, and at an assured period. It is spotless, speckless, and of a certain quality by no means despicable. The owner has it when he wants it, and it serves its turn. But, nevertheless, according to my thinking, the fullest flavour of the sun is given to that other fruit,—is given in the sun's own good time, if so be that no ungenial shade has interposed itself. I like the smack of the natural growth, and like it, perhaps, the better because that which has been obtained has been obtained without favour.

But the hobbledehoy, though he blushes when women address him, and is uneasy even when he is near them, though he is not master of his limbs in a ball-room, and is hardly master of his tongue at any time, is the most eloquent of beings, and especially eloquent among beautiful women. He enjoys all the triumphs of a Don Juan, without any of Don Juan's heartlessness, and is able to conquer in all encounters, through the force of his wit and the sweetness of his voice. But this eloquence is heard only by his own inner ears, and these triumphs are the triumphs of his imagination.

The true hobbledehoy is much alone, not being

greatly given to social intercourse even with other hobbledehoys—a trait in his character which I think has hardly been sufficiently observed by the world at large. He has probably become a hobbledehoy instead of an Apollo, because circumstances have not afforded him much social intercourse; and, therefore, he wanders about in solitude, taking long walks, in which he dreams of those successes which are so far removed from his powers of achievement. Out in the fields, with his stick in his hand, he is very eloquent, cutting off the heads of the springing summer weeds, as he practises his oratory with energy. And thus he feeds an imagination for which those who know him give him but scanty credit, and unconsciously prepares himself for that latter ripening, if only the ungenial shade will some day cease to interpose itself.

Such hobbledehoys receive but little petting, unless it be from a mother; and such a hobbledehoy was John Eames when he was sent away from Guestwick to begin his life in the big room of a public office in London. We may say that there was nothing of the young Apollo about him. But yet he was not without friends—friends who wished him well, and thought much of his welfare. And he had a younger sister who loved him dearly, who had no idea that he was a hobbledehoy, being somewhat of a hobbledehoya herself. Mrs. Eames, their mother, was a widow, living in a small house in Guestwick, whose husband had been throughout his whole life an intimate friend of our squire. He had been a man of many misfortunes, having begun the world almost with affluence, and having ended it in poverty. He had lived all his days in Guestwick, having at one time occupied a large tract of land, and lost much money in experimental farming; and late in life he had taken a small house on the outskirts of the town, and there had died, some two years previously to the commencement of this story. With no other man had Mr. Dale lived on terms so intimate; and when Mr. Eames died Mr. Dale acted as executor under his will, and as guardian

to his children. He had, moreover, obtained for John Eames that situation under the Crown which he now held.

And Mrs. Eames had been and still was on very friendly terms with Mrs. Dale. The squire had never taken quite kindly to Mrs. Eames, whom her husband had not met till he was already past forty years of age. But Mrs. Dale had made up by her kindness to the poor forlorn woman for any lack of that cordiality which might have been shown to her from the Great House. Mrs. Eames was a poor forlorn woman—forlorn even during the time of her husband's life, but very wo-begone now in her widowhood. In matters of importance the squire had been kind to her; arranging for her her little money affairs, advising her about her house and income, also getting for her that appointment for her son. But he snubbed her when he met her, and poor Mrs. Eames held him in great awe. Mrs. Dale held her brother-in-law in no awe, and sometimes gave to the widow from Guestwick advice quite at variance to that given by the squire. In this way there had grown up an intimacy between Bell and Lily and the young Eames, and either of the girls was prepared to declare that Johnny Eames was her own and well-loved friend. Nevertheless, they spoke of him occasionally with some little dash of merriment—as is not unusual with pretty girls who have hobbledehoys among their intimate friends, and who are not themselves unaccustomed to the grace of an Apollo.

I may as well announce at once that John Eames, when he went up to London, was absolutely and irretrievably in love with Lily Dale. He had declared his passion in the most moving language a hundred times; but he had declared it only to himself. He had written much poetry about Lily, but he kept his lines safe under double lock and key. When he gave the reins to his imagination, he flattered himself that he might win not only her but the world at large also by his verses; but he would have perished rather than

exhibit them to human eye. During the last ten weeks of his life at Guestwick, while he was preparing for his career in London, he hung about Allington, walking over frequently and then walking back again; but all in vain. During these visits he would sit in Mrs. Dale's drawing-room, speaking but little, and addressing himself usually to the mother; but on each occasion, as he started on his long, hot walk, he resolved that he would say something by which Lily might know of his love. When he left for London that something had not been said.

He had not dreamed of asking her to be his wife. John Eames was about to begin the world with eighty pounds a year, and an allowance of twenty more from his mother's purse. He was well aware that with such an income he could not establish himself as a married man in London, and he also felt that the man who might be fortunate enough to win Lily for his wife should be prepared to give her every soft luxury that the world could afford. He knew well that he ought not to expect any assurance of Lily's love; but, nevertheless, he thought it possible that he might give her an assurance of his love. It would probably be in vain. He had no real hope, unless when he was in one of those poetic moods. He had acknowledged to himself, in some indistinct way, that he was no more than a hobbledehoy, awkward, silent, ungainly, with a face unfinished, as it were, or unripe. All this he knew, and knew also that there were Apollos in the world who would be only too ready to carry off Lily in their splendid cars. But not the less did he make up his mind that having loved her once, it behoved him, as a true man, to love her on to the end.

One little word he had said to her when they parted, but it had been a word of friendship rather than of love. He had strayed out after her on to the lawn, leaving Bell alone in the drawing-room. Perhaps Lily had understood something of the boy's feeling, and had wished to speak kindly to him at parting, or almost more than kindly. There is a silent love which women

recognize, and which in some silent way they acknowledge,—giving gracious but silent thanks for the respect which accompanies it.

"I have come to say good-by, Lily," said Johnny Eames, following the girl down one of the paths.

"Good-by, John," said she, turning round. "You know how sorry we are to lose you. But it's a great thing for you to be going up to London."

"Well; yes. I suppose it is. I'd sooner remain here, though."

"What! stay here, doing nothing! I am sure you would not."

"Of course, I should like to do something. I mean——"

"You mean that it is painful to part with old friends; and I'm sure that we all feel that at parting with you. But you'll have a holiday sometimes, and then we shall see you."

"Yes; of course, I shall see you then. I think, Lily, I shall care more about seeing you than anybody."

"Oh, no, John. There'll be your own mother and sister."

"Yes; there'll be mother and Mary, of course. But I will come over here the very first day,—that is, if you'll care to see me."

"We shall care to see you very much. You know that. And—dear John, I do hope you'll be happy."

There was a tone in her voice as she spoke which almost upset him; or, I should rather say, which almost put him up upon his legs and made him speak; but its ultimate effect was less powerful. "Do you?" said he, as he held her hand for a few happy seconds. "And I'm sure I hope you'll always be happy. Good-by, Lily." Then he left her, returning to the house, and she continued her walk, wandering down among the trees in the shrubbery, and not showing herself for the next half hour. How many girls have some such lover as that,—a lover who says no more to them than Johnny Eames then said to Lily Dale, who never says more than that? And yet when, in after years, they

count over the names of all who have loved them, the name of that awkward youth is never forgotten.

That farewell had been spoken nearly two years since, and Lily Dale was then seventeen. Since that time, John Eames had been home once, and during his month's holidays had often visited Allington. But he had never improved upon that occasion of which I have told. It had seemed to him that Lily was colder to him than in old days, and he had become, if anything, more shy in his ways with her. He was to return to Guestwick again during this autumn; but, to tell honestly the truth in the matter, Lily Dale did not think or care very much for his coming. Girls of nineteen do not care for lovers of one-and-twenty, unless it be when the fruit has had the advantage of some forcing apparatus or southern wall.

John Eames's love was still as hot as ever, having been sustained on poetry, and kept alive, perhaps, by some close confidence in the ears of a brother clerk; but it is not to be supposed that during these two years he had been a melancholy lover. It might, perhaps, have been better for him had his disposition led him to that line of life. Such, however, had not been the case. He had already abandoned the flute on which he had learned to sound three sad notes before he left Guestwick, and, after the fifth or sixth Sunday, he had relinquished his solitary walks along the towing-path of the Regent's Park Canal. To think of one's absent love is very sweet; but it becomes monotonous after a mile or two of a towing-path, and the mind will turn away to Aunt Sally, the Cremorne Gardens, and financial questions. I doubt whether any girl would be satisfied with her lover's mind if she knew the whole of it.

"I say, Caudle, I wonder whether a fellow could get into a club?"

This proposition was made, on one of those Sunday walks, by John Eames to the friend of his bosom, a brother clerk, whose legitimate name was Cradell, and who was therefore called Caudle by his friends.

Get into a club? Fisher in our room belongs to a club."

"That's only a chess-club. I mean a regular club."

"One of the swell ones at the West End?" said Cradell, almost lost in admiration at the ambition of his friend.

"I shouldn't want it to be particularly swell. If a man isn't a swell, I don't see what he gets by going among those who are. But it is so uncommon slow at Mother Roper's." Now Mrs. Roper was a respectable lady, who kept a boarding-house in Burton Crescent, and to whom Mrs. Eames had been strongly recommended when she was desirous of finding a specially safe domicile for her son. For the first year of his life in London John Eames had lived alone in lodgings; but that had resulted in discomfort, solitude, and, alas! in some amount of debt, which had come heavily on the poor widow. Now, for the second year, some safer mode of life was necessary. She had learned that Mrs. Cradell, the widow of a barrister, who had also succeeded in getting her son into the Income-tax Office, had placed him in charge of Mrs. Roper; and she, with many injunctions to that motherly woman, submitted her own boy to the same custody.

"And about going to church?" Mrs. Eames had said to Mrs. Roper.

"I don't suppose I can look after that, ma'am," Mrs. Roper had answered, conscientiously. "Young gentlemen choose mostly their own churches."

"But they do go?" asked the mother, very anxious in her heart as to this new life in which her boy was to be left to follow in so many things the guidance of his own lights.

"They who have been brought up steady do so, mostly."

"He has been brought up steady, Mrs. Roper. He has, indeed. And you won't give him a latch-key?"

"Well, they always do ask for it."

"But he won't insist, if you tell him that I had rather that he shouldn't have one."

Mrs. Roper promised accordingly, and Johnny Eames was left under her charge. He did ask for the latch-key, and Mrs. Roper answered as she was bidden. But he asked again, having been sophisticated by the philosophy of Cradell, and then Mrs. Roper handed him the key. She was a woman who plumed herself on being as good as her word, not understanding that any one could justly demand from her more than that. She gave Johnny Eames the key, as doubtless she had intended to do; for Mrs. Roper knew the world, and understood that young men without latch-keys would not remain with her.

"I thought you didn't seem to find it so dull since Amelia came home," said Cradell.

"Amelia! What's Amelia to me? I have told you everything, Cradell, and yet you can talk to me about Amelia Roper!"

"Come now, Johnny——" He had always been called Johnny, and the name had gone with him to his office. Even Amelia Roper had called him Johnny on more than one occasion before this. "You were as sweet to her the other night as though there were no such person as L. D. in existence." John Eames turned away and shook his head. Nevertheless, the words of his friend were grateful to him. The character of a Don Juan was not unpleasant to his imagination, and he liked to think that he might amuse Amelia Roper with a passing word, though his heart was true to Lilian Dale. In truth, however, many more of the passing words had been spoken by the fair Amelia than by him.

Mrs. Roper had been quite as good as her word when she told Mrs. Eames that her household was composed of herself, of a son who was in an attorney's office, of an ancient maiden cousin, named Miss Spruce, who lodged with her, and of Mr. Cradell. The divine Amelia had not then been living with her, and the nature of the statement which she was making by no means compelled her to inform Mrs. Eames that the young lady would probably return home in the following

winter. A Mr. and Mrs. Lupex had also joined the family lately, and Mrs. Roper's house was now supposed to be full.

And it must be acknowledged that Johnny Eames had, in certain unguarded moments, confided to Cradell the secret of a second weaker passion for Amelia. "She is a fine girl,—a deuced fine girl!" Johnny Eames had said, using a style of language which he had learned since he left Guestwick and Allington. Mr. Cradell, also, was an admirer of the fair sex; and, alas! that I should say so, Mrs. Lupex, at the present moment, was the object of his admiration. Not that he entertained the slightest idea of wronging Mr. Lupex,—a man who was a scene-painter, and knew the world. Mr. Cradell admired Mrs. Lupex as a connoisseur, not simply as a man. "By heavens! Johnny, what a figure that woman has!" he said, one morning, as they were walking to their office.

"Yes; she stands well on her pins."

"I should think she did. If I understand anything of form," said Cradell, "that woman is nearly perfect. What a torso she has!"

From which expression, and from the fact that Mrs. Lupex depended greatly upon her stays and crinoline for such figure as she succeeded in displaying, it may, perhaps, be understood that Mr. Cradell did not understand much about form.

"It seems to me that her nose isn't quite straight," said Johnny Eames. Now, it undoubtedly was the fact that the nose on Mrs. Lupex's face was a little awry. It was a long, thin nose, which, as it progressed forward into the air, certainly had a preponderating bias towards the left side.

"I care more for figure than face," said Cradell. "But Mrs. Lupex has fine eyes—very fine eyes."

"And knows how to use them, too," said Johnny.

"Why shouldn't she? And then she has lovely hair."

"Only she never brushes it in the morning."

"Do you know, I like that kind of deshabille," said Cradell. "Too much care always betrays itself."

"But a woman should be tidy."

"What a word to apply to such a creature as Mrs. Lupex! I call her a splendid woman. And how well she was got up last night. Do you know, I've an idea that Lupex treats her very badly. She said a word or two to me yesterday that——" and then he paused. There are some confidences which a man does not share even with his dearest friend.

"I rather fancy it's quite the other way," said Eames.

"How the other way?"

"That Lupex has quite as much as he likes of Mrs. L. The sound of her voice sometimes makes me shake in my shoes, I know."

"I like a woman with spirit," said Cradell.

"Oh, so do I. But one may have too much of a good thing. Amelia did tell me;—only you won't mention it."

"Of course, I won't."

"She told me that Lupex sometimes was obliged to run away from her. He goes down to the theatre, and remains there two or three days at a time. Then she goes to fetch him, and there is no end of a row in the house."

"The fact is, he drinks," said Cradell. "By George, I pity a woman whose husband drinks—and such a woman as that, too!"

"Take care, old fellow, or you'll find yourself in a scrape."

"I know what I'm at. Lord bless you, I'm not going to lose my head because I see a fine woman."

"Or your heart either?"

"Oh, heart! There's nothing of that kind of thing about me. I regard a woman as a picture or a statue. I dare say I shall marry some day, because men do; but I've no idea of losing myself about a woman."

"I'd lose myself ten times over for——"

"L. D.," said Cradell.

"That I would. And yet I know I shall never have her. I'm a jolly, laughing sort of fellow; and yet, do you know, Caudle, when that girl marries, it will be all up with me. It will, indeed."

"Do you mean that you'll cut your throat?"

"No; I shan't do that. I shan't do anything of that sort; and yet it will be all up with me."

"You are going down there in October;—why don't you ask her to have you?"

"With ninety pounds a year!" His grateful country had twice increased his salary at the rate of five pounds each year. "With ninety pounds a year, and twenty allowed me by my mother!"

"She could wait, I suppose. I should ask her, and no mistake. If one is to love a girl, it's no good one going on in that way!"

"It isn't much good, certainly," said Johnny Eames. And then they reached the door of the Income-tax Office, and each went away to his own desk.

From this little dialogue, it may be imagined that though Mrs. Roper was as good as her word, she was not exactly the woman whom Mrs. Eames would have wished to select as a protecting angel for her son. But the truth I take to be this, that protecting angels for widows' sons, at forty-eight pounds a year, paid quarterly, are not to be found very readily in London. Mrs. Roper was not worse than others of her class. She would much have preferred lodgers who were respectable to those who were not so,—if she could only have found respectable lodgers as she wanted them. Mr. and Mrs. Lupex hardly came under that denomination; and when she gave them up her big front bed-room at a hundred a year, she knew she was doing wrong. And she was troubled, too, about her own daughter Amelia, who was already over thirty years of age. Amelia was a very clever young woman, who had been, if the truth must be told, first young lady at a millinery establishment in Manchester. Mrs. Roper knew that Mrs. Eames and Mrs. Cradell

would not wish their sons to associate with her daughter. But what could she do? She could not refuse the shelter of her own house to her own child, and yet her heart misgave her when she saw Amelia flirting with young Eames.

"I wish, Amelia, you wouldn't have so much to say to that young man."

"Laws, mother."

"So I do. If you go on like that, you'll put me out of both my lodgers."

"Go on like what, mother? If a gentleman speaks to me, I suppose I'm to answer him? I know how to behave myself, I believe." And then she gave her head a toss. Whereupon her mother was silent; for her mother was afraid of her.

CHAPTER V

ABOUT L. D.

Apollo Crosbie left London for Allington on the 31st of August, intending to stay there four weeks, with the declared intention of recruiting his strength by an absence of two months from official cares, and with no fixed purpose as to his destiny for the last of those two months. Offers of hospitality had been made to him by the dozen. Lady Hartletop's doors, in Shropshire, were open to him, if he chose to enter them. He had been invited by the Countess de Courcy to join her suite at Courcy Castle. His special friend Montgomerie Dobbs had a place in Scotland, and then there was a yachting party by which he was much wanted. But Mr. Crosbie had as yet knocked himself down to none of these biddings, having before him when he left London no other fixed engagement than that which took him to Allington. On the first of October we shall also find ourselves at Allington in company with Johnny Eames; and Apollo Crosbie will still be there,—by no means to the comfort of our friend from the Income-tax Office.

Johnny Eames cannot be called unlucky in that matter of his annual holiday, seeing that he was allowed to leave London in October, a month during which few chose to own that they remain in town. For myself, I always regard May as the best month for holiday-making; but then no Londoner cares to be absent in May. Young Eames, though he lived in Burton Crescent and had as yet no connection with the West End, had already learned his lesson in this respect. "Those fellows in the big room want me to take May," he had said to his friend Cradell. "They must think I'm uncommon green."

"It's too bad," said Cradell. "A man shouldn't be asked to take his leave in May. I never did, and what's more, I never will. I'd go to the Board first."

Eames had escaped this evil without going to the Board, and had succeeded in obtaining for himself for his own holiday that month of October, which, of all months, is perhaps the most highly esteemed for holiday purposes. "I shall go down by the mail-train to-morrow night," he said to Amelia Roper, on the evening before his departure. At that moment he was sitting alone with Amelia in Mrs. Roper's back drawing-room. In the front room Cradell was talking to Mrs. Lupex; but as Miss Spruce was with them, it may be presumed that Mr. Lupex need have had no cause for jealousy.

"Yes," said Amelia; "I know how great is your haste to get down to that fascinating spot. I could not expect that you would lose one single hour in hurrying away from Burton Crescent."

Amelia Roper was a tall, well-grown young woman, with dark hair and dark eyes;—not handsome, for her nose was thick, and the lower part of her face was heavy, but yet not without some feminine attractions. Her eyes were bright; but then, also, they were mischievous. She could talk fluently enough; but then, also, she could scold. She could assume sometimes the plumage of a dove; but then again she could occasionally ruffle her feathers like an angry kite. I

am quite prepared to acknowledge that John Eames should have kept himself clear of Amelia Roper; but then young men so frequently do those things which they should not do!

"After twelve months up here in London one is glad to get away to one's own friends," said Johnny.

"Your own friends, Mr. Eames! What sort of friends? Do you suppose I don't know?"

"Well, no. I don't think you do know."

"L. D.!" said Amelia, showing that Lily had been spoken of among people who should never have been allowed to hear her name. But perhaps, after all, no more than those two initials were known in Burton Crescent. From the tone which was now used in naming them, it was sufficiently manifest that Amelia considered herself to be wronged by their very existence.

"L. S. D.," said Johnny, attempting the line of a witty, gay young spendthrift. "That's my love; pounds, shillings, and pence; and a very coy mistress she is."

"Nonsense, sir. Don't talk to me in that way. As if I didn't know where your heart was. What right had you to speak to me if you had an L. D. down in the country?"

It should be here declared on behalf of poor John Eames that he had not ever spoken to Amelia—he had not spoken to her in any such phrase as her words seemed to imply. But then he had written to her a fatal note of which we will speak further before long, and that perhaps was quite as bad,—or worse.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Johnny. But the laugh was assumed, and not assumed with ease.

"Yes, sir; it's a laughing matter to you, I dare say. It is very easy for a man to laugh under such circumstances;—that is to say, if he is perfectly heartless,—if he's got a stone inside his bosom instead of flesh and blood. Some men are made of stone, I know, and are troubled with no feelings."

"What is it you want me to say? You pretend to

know all about it, and it wouldn't be civil in me to contradict you."

"What is it I want? You know very well what I want; or rather, I don't want anything. What is it to me? It is nothing to me about L. D. You can go down to Allington and do what you like for me. Only I hate such ways."

"What ways, Amelia?"

"What ways! Now, look here, Johnny: I'm not going to make a fool of myself for any man. When I came home here three months ago—and I wish I never had;"—she paused here a moment, waiting for a word of tenderness; but as the word of tenderness did not come, she went on—"but when I did come home, I didn't think there was a man in all London could make me care for him,—that I didn't. And now you're going away, without so much as hardly saying a word to me." And then she brought out her handkerchief.

"What am I to say, when you keep on scolding me all the time?"

"Scolding you!—And me too! No, Johnny, I ain't scolding you, and don't mean to. If it's to be all over between us, say the word, and I'll take myself away out of the house before you come back again. I've had no secrets from you. I can go back to my business in Manchester, though it is beneath my birth, and not what I've been used to. If L. D. is more to you than I am, I won't stand in your way. Only say the word."

L. D. was more to him than Amelia Roper,—ten times more to him. L. D. would have been everything to him, and Amelia Roper was worse than nothing. He felt all this at the moment, and struggled hard to collect an amount of courage that would make him free.

"Say the word," said she, rising on her feet before him, "and all between you and me shall be over. I have got your promise, but I'd scorn to take advantage. If Amelia hasn't got your heart, she'd

despise to take your hand. Only I must have an answer."

It would seem that an easy way of escape was offered to him; but the lady probably knew that the way as offered by her was not easy to such an one as John Eames.

"Amelia," he said, still keeping his seat.

"Well, sir?"

"You know I love you."

"And about L. D.?"

"If you choose to believe all the nonsense that Cradell puts into your head, I can't help it. If you like to make yourself jealous about two letters, it isn't my fault."

"And you love me?" said she.

"Of course I love you." And then, upon hearing these words, Amelia threw herself into his arms.

As the folding doors between the two rooms were not closed, and as Miss Spruce was sitting in her easy-chair immediately opposite to them, it was probable that she saw what passed. But Miss Spruce was a taciturn old lady, not easily excited to any show of surprise or admiration; and as she had lived with Mrs. Roper for the last twelve years, she was probably well acquainted with her daughter's ways.

"You'll be true to me?" said Amelia, during the moment of that embrace—"true to me for ever?"

"Oh, yes; that's a matter of course," said Johnny Eames. And then she liberated him; and the two strolled into the front sitting-room.

"I declare, Mr. Eames," said Mrs. Lupex, "I'm glad you've come. Here's Mr. Cradell does say such queer things."

"Queer things!" said Cradell. "Now, Miss Spruce, I appeal to you—Have I said any queer things?"

"If you did, sir, I didn't notice them," said Miss Spruce.

"I noticed them, then," said Mrs. Lupex. "An unmarried man like Mr. Cradell has no business to

know whether a married lady wears a cap or her own hair—has he, Mr. Eames?"

"I don't think I ever know," said Johnny, not intending any sarcasm on Mrs. Lupex.

"I dare say not, sir," said the lady. "We all know where your attention is riveted. If you were to wear a cap, my dear, somebody would see the difference very soon—wouldn't they, Miss Spruce?"

"I dare say they would," said Miss Spruce.

"If I could look as nice in a cap as you do, Mrs. Lupex, I'd wear one to-morrow," said Amelia, who did not wish to quarrel with the married lady at the present moment. There were occasions, however, on which Mrs. Lupex and Miss Roper were by no means so gracious to each other.

"Does Lupex like caps?" asked Cradell.

"If I wore a plumed helmet on my head, it's my belief he wouldn't know the difference; nor yet if I had got no head at all. That's what comes of getting married. If you'll take my advice, Miss Roper, you'll stay as you are; even though somebody should break his heart about it. Wouldn't you, Miss Spruce?"

"Oh, as for me, I'm an old woman, you know," said Miss Spruce, which was certainly true.

"I don't see what any woman gets by marrying," continued Mrs. Lupex. "But a man gains everything. He don't know how to live, unless he's got a woman to help him."

"But is love to go for nothing?" said Cradell.

"Oh, love! I don't believe in love. I suppose I thought I loved once, but what did it come to after all? Now, there's Mr. Eames—we all know he's in love."

"It comes natural to me, Mrs. Lupex. I was born so," said Johnny.

"And there's Miss Roper—one never ought to speak free about a lady, but perhaps she's in love too."

"Speak for yourself, Mrs. Lupex," said Amelia.

"There's no harm in saying that, is there? I'm sure, if you ain't, you're very hard-hearted; for, if

ever there was a true lover, I believe you've got one of your own. My!—if there's not Lupex's step on the stair! What can bring him home at this hour? If he's been drinking, he'll come home as cross as anything." Then Mr. Lupex entered the room, and the pleasantness of the party was destroyed.

It may be said that neither Mrs. Cradell nor Mrs. Eames would have placed their sons in Burton Crescent if they had known the dangers into which the young men would fall. Each, it must be acknowledged, was imprudent; but each clearly saw the imprudence of the other. Not a week before this, Cradell had seriously warned his friend against the arts of Miss Roper. "By George, Johnny, you'll get yourself entangled with that girl."

"One always has to go through that sort of thing," said Johnny.

"Yes; but those who go through too much of it never get out again. Where would you be if she got a written promise of marriage from you?"

Poor Johnny did not answer this immediately, for in very truth Amelia Roper had such a document in her possession.

"Where should I be?" said he. "Among the breaches of promise, I suppose."

"Either that, or else among the victims of matrimony. My belief of you is, that if you gave such a promise, you'd carry it out."

"Perhaps I should," said Johnny; "but I don't know. It's a matter of doubt what a man ought to do in such a case."

"But there's been nothing of that kind yet?"

"Oh dear, no!"

"If I was you, Johnny, I'd keep away from her. It's very good fun, of course, that sort of thing; but it is so uncommon dangerous! Where would you be now with such a girl as that for your wife?"

Such had been the caution given by Cradell to his friend. And now, just as he was starting for Allington, Eames returned the compliment. They

had gone together to the Great Western station at Paddington, and Johnny tendered his advice as they were walking together up and down the platform.

"I say, Caudle, old boy, you'll find yourself in trouble with that Mrs. Lupex, if you don't take care of yourself."

"But I shall take care of myself. There's nothing so safe as a little nonsense with a married woman. Of course, it means nothing, you know, between her and me."

"I don't suppose it does mean anything. But she's always talking about Lupex being jealous; and if he was to cut up rough, you wouldn't find it pleasant."

Cradell, however, seemed to think that there was no danger. His little affair with Mrs. Lupex was quite platonic and safe. As for doing any real harm, his principles, as he assured his friend, were too high. Mrs. Lupex was a woman of talent, whom no one seemed to understand, and, therefore, he had taken some pleasure in studying her character. It was merely a study of character, and nothing more. Then the friends parted, and Eames was carried away by the night mail-train down to Guestwick.

How his mother was up to receive him at four o'clock in the morning, how her maternal heart was rejoicing at seeing the improvement in his gait, and the manliness of appearance imparted to him by his whiskers, I need not describe at length. Many of the attributes of a hobbledehoy had fallen from him, and even Lily Dale might now probably acknowledge that he was no longer a boy. All which might be regarded as good, if only in putting off childish things he had taken up things which were better than childish.

On the very first day of his arrival he made his way over to Allington. He did not walk on this occasion as he had used to do in the old happy days. He had an idea that it might not be well for him to go into Mrs. Dale's drawing-room with the dust of the road on his boots, and the heat of the day on his brow. So he borrowed a horse and rode over, taking

some pride in a pair of spurs which he had bought in Piccadilly, and in his kid gloves, which were brought out new for the occasion. Alas, alas! I fear that those two years in London have not improved John Eames; and yet I have to acknowledge that John Eames is one of the heroes of my story.

On entering Mrs. Dale's drawing-room he found Mrs. Dale and her eldest daughter. Lily at the moment was not there, and as he shook hands with the other two, of course, he asked for her.

"She is only in the garden," said Bell. "She will be here directly."

"She has walked across to the Great House with Mr. Crosbie," said Mrs. Dale; "but she is not going to remain. She will be so glad to see you, John! We all expected you to-day."

"Did you?" said Johnny, whose heart had been plunged into cold water at the mention of Mr. Crosbie's name. He had been thinking of Lilian Dale ever since his friend had left him on the railway platform; and, as I beg to assure all ladies who may read my tale, the truth of his love for Lily had moulted no feather through that unholy liaison between him and Miss Roper. I fear that I shall be disbelieved in this; but it was so. His heart was and ever had been true to Lilian, although he had allowed himself to be talked into declarations of affection by such a creature as Amelia Roper. He had been thinking of this meeting with Lily all the night and throughout the morning, and now he heard that she was walking alone about the gardens with a strange gentleman. That Mr. Crosbie was very grand and very fashionable he had heard, but he knew no more of him. Why should Mr. Crosbie be allowed to walk with Lily Dale? And why should Mrs. Dale mention the circumstance as though it were quite a thing of course? Such mystery as there was in this was solved very quickly.

"I'm sure Lily won't object to my telling such a dear friend as you what has happened," said Mrs.

Dale. "She is engaged to be married to Mr. Crosbie."

The water into which Johnny's heart had been plunged now closed over his head and left him speechless. Lily Dale was engaged to be married to Mr. Crosbie! He knew that he should have spoken when he heard the tidings. He knew that the moments of silence as they passed by told his secret to the two women before him,—that secret which it would now behove him to conceal from all the world. But yet he could not speak.

"We are all very well pleased at the match," said Mrs. Dale, wishing to spare him.

"Nothing can be nicer than Mr. Crosbie," said Bell. "We have often talked about you, and he will be so happy to know you."

"He won't know much about me," said Johnny; and even in speaking these few senseless words—words which he uttered because it was necessary that he should say something—the tone of his voice was altered. He would have given the world to have been master of himself at this moment, but he felt that he was utterly vanquished.

"There is Lily coming across the lawn," said Mrs. Dale.

"Then I'd better go," said Eames. "Don't say anything about it; pray don't." And then, without waiting for another word, he escaped out of the drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI

BEAUTIFUL DAYS

I AM well aware that I have not as yet given any description of Bell and Lilian Dale, and equally well aware that the longer the doing so is postponed the greater the difficulty becomes. I wish it could be understood without any description that they were

two pretty, fair-haired girls, of whom Bell was the tallest and the prettiest, whereas Lily was almost as pretty as her sister, and perhaps was more attractive.

They were fair-haired girls, very like each other, of whom I have before my mind's eye a distinct portrait, which I fear I shall not be able to draw in any such manner as will make it distinct to others. They were something below the usual height, being slight and slender in all their proportions. Lily was the shorter of the two, but the difference was so trifling that it was hardly remembered unless the two were together. And when I said that Bell was the prettier, I should, perhaps, have spoken more justly had I simply declared that her features were more regular than her sister's. The two girls were very fair, so that the soft tint of colour which relieved the whiteness of their complexion was rather acknowledged than distinctly seen. It was there, telling its own tale of health, as its absence would have told a tale of present or coming sickness; and yet nobody could ever talk about the colour in their cheeks. The hair of the two girls was so alike in hue and texture, that no one, not even their mother, could say that there was a difference. It was not flaxen hair, and yet it was very light. Nor did it approach to auburn; and yet there ran through it a golden tint that gave it a distinct brightness of its own. But with Bell it was more plentiful than with Lily, and therefore Lily would always talk of her own scanty locks, and tell how beautiful were those belonging to her sister. Nevertheless Lily's head was quite as lovely as her sister's; for its form was perfect, and the simple braids in which they both wore their hair did not require any great exuberance in quantity. Their eyes were brightly blue; but Bell's were long, and soft, and tender, often hardly daring to raise themselves to your face; while those of Lily were rounder, but brighter, and seldom kept by any want of courage from fixing themselves where they pleased. And Lily's face was perhaps less oval in its form—less

perfectly oval—than her sister's. The shape of the forehead was, I think, the same, but with Bell the chin was something more slender and delicate. But Bell's chin was unmarked, whereas on her sister's there was a dimple which amply compensated for any other deficiency in its beauty. Bell's teeth were more even than her sister's; but then she showed her teeth more frequently. Her lips were thinner, and, as I cannot but think, less expressive. Her nose was decidedly more regular in its beauty, for Lily's nose was somewhat broader than it should have been. It may, therefore, be understood that Bell would be considered the beauty by the family.

But there was, perhaps, more in the general impression made by these girls, and in the whole tone of their appearance, than in the absolute loveliness of their features or the grace of their figures. There was about them a dignity of demeanour devoid of all stiffness or pride, and a maidenly modesty which gave itself no airs. In them was always apparent that sense of security which women should receive from an unconscious dependence on their own mingled purity and weakness. These two girls were never afraid of men,—never looked as though they were so afraid. And I may say that they had little cause for that kind of fear to which I allude. It might be the lot of either of them to be ill-used by a man, but it was hardly possible that either of them should ever be insulted by one. Lily, as may, perhaps, have been already seen, could be full of play, but in her play she never so carried herself that any one could forget what was due to her.

And now Lily Dale was engaged to be married, and the days of her playfulness were over. It sounds sad, this sentence against her, but I fear that it must be regarded as true. And when I think that it is true,—when I see that the sportiveness and kitten-like gambols of girlhood should be over, and generally are over, when a girl has given her troth, it becomes a matter of regret to me that the feminine world

should be in such a hurry after matrimony. I have, however, no remedy to offer for the evil; and, indeed, am aware that the evil, if there be an evil, is not well expressed in the words I have used. The hurry is not for matrimony, but for love. Then, the love once attained, matrimony seizes it for its own, and the evil is accomplished.

And Lily Dale was engaged to be married to Adolphus Crosbie,—to Apollo Crosbie, as she still called him, confiding her little joke to his own ears. And to her he was an Apollo, as a man who is loved should be to the girl who loves him. He was handsome, graceful, clever, self-confident, and always cheerful when she asked him to be cheerful. But he had also his more serious moments, and could talk to her of serious matters. He would read to her, and explain to her things which had hitherto been too hard for her young intelligence. His voice, too, was pleasant, and well under command. It could be pathetic if pathos were required, or ring with laughter as merry as her own. Was not such a man fit to be an Apollo to such a girl, when once the girl had acknowledged to herself that she loved him?

She had acknowledged it to herself, and had acknowledged it to him,—as the reader will perhaps say without much delay. But the courtship had so been carried on that no delay had been needed. All the world had smiled upon it. When Mr. Crosbie had first come among them at Allington, as Bernard's guest, during those few days of his early visit, it had seemed as though Bell had been chiefly noticed by him. And Bell in her own quiet way had accepted his admiration, saying nothing of it and thinking but very little. Lily was heart-free at the time, and had ever been so. No first shadow from Love's wing had as yet been thrown across the pure tablets of her bosom. With Bell it was not so,—not so in absolute strictness. Bell's story, too, must be told, but not on this page. But before Crosbie had come among them, it was a thing fixed in her mind that such love

as she had felt must be overcome and annihilated. We may say that it had been overcome and annihilated, and that she would have sinned in no way had she listened to vows from this new Apollo. It is almost sad to think that such a man might have had the love of either of such girls, but I fear that I must acknowledge that it was so. Apollo, in the plenitude of his power, soon changed his mind; and before the end of his first visit, had transferred the distant homage which he was then paying from the elder to the younger sister. He afterwards returned, as the squire's guest, for a longer sojourn among them, and at the end of the first month had already been accepted as Lily's future husband.

It was beautiful to see how Bell changed in her mood towards Crosbie and towards her sister as soon as she perceived how the affair was going. She was not long in perceiving it, having caught the first glimpses of the idea on that evening when they both dined at the Great House, leaving their mother alone to eat or to neglect the peas. For some six or seven weeks Crosbie had been gone, and during that time Bell had been much more open in speaking of him than her sister. She had been present when Crosbie had bid them good-by, and had listened to his eagerness as he declared to Lily that he should soon be back again at Allington. Lily had taken this very quietly, as though it had not belonged at all to herself; but Bell had seen something of the truth, and, believing in Crosbie as an earnest, honest man, had spoken kind words of him, fostering any little aptitude for love which might already have formed itself in Lily's bosom.

"But he is such an Apollo, you know," Lily had said.

"He is a gentleman; I can see that."

"Oh, yes; a man can't be an Apollo unless he's a gentleman."

"And he's very clever."

"I suppose he is clever." There was nothing more

said about his being a mere clerk. Indeed, Lily had changed her mind on that subject. Johnny Eames was a mere clerk; whereas Crosbie, if he was to be called a clerk at all, was a clerk of some very special denomination. There may be a great difference between one clerk and another! A Clerk of the Council and a parish clerk are very different persons. Lily had got some such idea as this into her head as she attempted in her own mind to rescue Mr. Crosbie from the lower orders of the Government service.

"I wish he were not coming," Mrs. Dale had said to her eldest daughter.

"I think you are wrong, mamma."

"But if she should become fond of him, and then——"

"Lily will never become really fond of any man till he shall have given her proper reason. And if he admires her, why should they not come together?"

"But she is so young, Bell."

"She is nineteen; and if they were engaged, perhaps, they might wait for a year or so. But it's no good talking in that way, mamma. If you were to tell Lily not to give him encouragement, she would not speak to him."

"I should not think of interfering."

"No, mamma; and therefore it must take its course. For myself, I like Mr. Crosbie very much."

"So do I, my dear."

"And so does my uncle. I wouldn't have Lily take a lover of my uncle's choosing."

"I should hope not."

"But it must be considered a good thing if she happens to choose one of his liking."

In this way the matter had been talked over between the mother and her elder daughter. Then Mr. Crosbie had come; and before the end of the first month his declared admiration for Lily had proved the correctness of her sister's foresight. And during that short courtship all had gone well with the lovers. The squire from the first had declared himself satisfied with the

match, informing Mrs. Dale, in his cold manner, that Mr. Crosbie was a gentleman with an income sufficient for matrimony.

"It would be close enough in London," Mrs. Dale had said.

"He has more than my brother had when he married," said the squire.

"If he will only make her as happy as your brother made me,—while it lasted!" said Mrs. Dale, as she turned away her face to conceal a tear that was coming. And then there was nothing more said about it between the squire and his sister-in-law. The squire spoke no word as to assistance in money matters,—did not even suggest that he would lend a hand to the young people at starting, as an uncle in such a position might surely have done. It may well be conceived that Mrs. Dale herself said nothing on the subject. And, indeed, it may be conceived, also, that the squire, let his intentions be what they might, would not divulge them to Mrs. Dale. This was uncomfortable, but the position was one that was well understood between them.

Bernard Dale was still at Allington, and had remained there through the period of Crosbie's absence. Whatever words Mrs. Dale might choose to speak on the matter would probably be spoken to him; but, then, Bernard could be quite as close as his uncle. When Crosbie returned, he and Bernard had, of course, lived much together; and, as was natural, there came to be close discussion between them as to the two girls, when Crosbie allowed it to be understood that his liking for Lily was becoming strong.

"You know, I suppose, that my uncle wishes me to marry the elder one," Bernard had said.

"I have guessed as much."

"And I suppose the match will come off. She's a pretty girl, and as good as gold."

"Yes, she is."

"I don't pretend to be very much in love with her. It's not my way, you know. But, some of these days, I shall ask her to have me, and I suppose it'll all go

right. The governor has distinctly promised to allow me eight hundred a year off the estate, and to take us in for three months every year if we wish it. I told him simply that I couldn't do it for less, and he agreed with me."

"You and he get on very well together."

"Oh, yes! There's never been any fal-lal between us about love, and duty, and all that. I think we understand each other, and that's everything. He knows the comfort of standing well with the heir, and I know the comfort of standing well with the owner." It must be admitted, I think, that there was a great deal of sound, common sense about Bernard Dale.

"What will he do for the younger sister?" asked Crosbie; and, as he asked the important question, a close observer might have perceived that there was some slight tremor in his voice.

"Ah! that's more than I can tell you. If I were you, I should ask him. The governor is a plain man, and likes plain business."

"I suppose you couldn't ask him?"

"No; I don't think I could. It is my belief that he will not let her go by any means empty-handed."

"Well, I should suppose not."

"But remember this, Crosbie,—I can say nothing to you on which you are to depend. Lily, also, is as good as gold; and, as you seem to be fond of her, I should ask the governor, if I were you, in so many words, what he intends to do. Of course, it's against my interest, for every shilling he gives Lily will ultimately come out of my pocket. But I'm not the man to care about that, as you know."

What might be Crosbie's knowledge on this subject we will not here inquire; but we may say that it would have mattered very little to him out of whose pocket the money came, so long as it went into his own. When he felt quite sure of Lily,—having, in fact, received Lily's permission to speak to her uncle, and Lily's promise that she would herself speak to her mother,—he did tell the squire what was his intention.

This he did in an open, manly way, as though he felt that in asking for much he also offered to give much.

"I have nothing to say against it," said the squire.

"And I have your permission to consider myself as engaged to her?"

"If you have hers and her mother's. Of course you are aware that I have no authority over her."

"She would not marry without your sanction."

"She is very good to think so much of her uncle," said the squire; and his words as he spoke them sounded very cold in Crosbie's ears. After that Crosbie said nothing about money, having to confess to himself that he was afraid to do so. "And what would be the use?" said he to himself, wishing to make excuses for what he felt to be weak in his own conduct. "If he should refuse to give her a shilling I could not go back from it now." And then some ideas ran across his mind as to the injustice to which men are subjected in this matter of matrimony. A man has to declare himself before it is fitting that he should make any inquiry about a lady's money; and then, when he has declared himself, any such inquiry is unavailing. Which consideration somewhat cooled the ardour of his happiness. Lily Dale was very pretty, very nice, very refreshing in her innocence, her purity, and her quick intelligence. No amusement could be more deliciously amusing than that of making love to Lily Dale. Her way of flattering her lover without any intention of flattery on her part, had put Crosbie into a seventh heaven. In all his experience he had known nothing like it. "You may be sure of this," she had said,—"I shall love you with all my heart and all my strength." It was very nice;—but then what were they to live upon? Could it be that he, Adolphus Crosbie, should settle down on the north side of the New Road, as a married man, with eight hundred a year? If indeed the squire would be as good to Lily as he had promised to be to Bell, then indeed things might be made to arrange themselves.

But there was no such drawback on Lily's happiness. Her ideas about money were rather vague, but they

were very honest. She knew she had none of her own, but supposed it was a husband's duty to find what would be needful. She knew she had none of her own, and was therefore aware that she ought not to expect luxuries in the little household that was to be prepared for her. She hoped, for his sake, that her uncle might give some assistance, but was quite prepared to prove that she could be a good poor man's wife. In the old colloquies on such matters between her and her sister, she had always declared that some decent income should be considered as indispensable before love could be entertained. But eight hundred a year had been considered as doing much more than fulfilling this stipulation. Bell had had high-flown notions as to the absolute glory of poverty. She had declared that income should not be considered at all. If she had loved a man, she could allow herself to be engaged to him, even though he had no income. Such had been their theories; and as regarded money, Lily was quite contented with the way in which she had carried out her own.

In these beautiful days there was nothing to check her happiness. Her mother and sister united in telling her that she had done well,—that she was happy in her choice, and justified in her love. On that first day, when she told her mother all, she had been made exquisitely blissful by the way in which her tidings had been received.

"Oh! mamma, I must tell you something," she said, coming up to her mother's bedroom, after a long ramble with Mr. Crosbie through those Allington fields.

"Is it about Mr. Crosbie?"

"Yes, mamma." And then the rest had been said through the medium of warm embraces and happy tears rather than by words.

As she sat in her mother's room, hiding her face on her mother's shoulders, Bell had come, and had knelt at her feet.

"Dear Lily," she had said, "I am so glad." And then Lily remembered how she had, as it were, stolen

her lover from her sister, and she put her arms round Bell's neck and kissed her.

"I knew how it was going to be from the very first," said Bell. "Did I not mamma?"

"I'm sure I didn't," said Lily. "I never thought such a thing was possible."

"But we did,—mamma and I."

"Did you?" said Lily.

"Bell told me that it was to be so," said Mrs. Dale. "But I could hardly bring myself at first to think that he was good enough for my darling."

"Oh, mamma! you must not say that. You must think that he is good enough for anything."

"I will think that he is very good."

"Who could be better? And then, when you remember all that he is to give up for my sake!—And what can I do for him in return? What have I got to give him?"

Neither Mrs. Dale nor Bell could look at the matter in this light, thinking that Lily gave quite as much as she received. But they both declared that Crosbie was perfect, knowing that by such assurances only could they now administer to Lily's happiness; and Lily, between them, was made perfect in her happiness, receiving all manner of encouragement in her love, and being nourished in her passion by the sympathy and approval of her mother and sister.

And then had come that visit from Johnny Eames. As the poor fellow marched out of the room, giving them no time to say farewell, Mrs. Dale and Bell looked at each other sadly; but they were unable to concoct any arrangement, for Lily had run across the lawn, and was already on the ground before the window.

"As soon as we got to the end of the shrubbery there were uncle Christopher and Bernard close to us; so I told Adolphus he might go on by himself."

"And who do you think has been here?" said Bell. But Mrs. Dale said nothing. Had time been given to her to use her own judgment, nothing should have been said at that moment as to Johnny's visit.

"Has anybody been here since I went? Whoever it was didn't stay very long."

"Poor Johnny Eames," said Bell. Then the colour came up into Lily's face, and she bethought herself in a moment that the old friend of her young days had loved her, that he, too, had had hopes as to his love, and that now he had heard tidings which would put an end to such hopes. She understood it all in a moment, but understood also that it was necessary that she should conceal such understanding.

"Dear Johnny!" she said. "Why did he not wait for me?"

"We told him you were out," said Mrs. Dale. "He will be here again before long, no doubt."

"And he knows——?"

"Yes; I thought you would not object to my telling him."

"No, mamma; of course not. And he has gone back to Guestwick?"

There was no answer given to this question, nor were there any further words then spoken about Johnny Eames. Each of these women understood exactly how the matter stood, and each knew that the others understood it. The young man was loved by them all, but not loved with that sort of admiring affection which had been accorded to Mr. Crosbie. Johnny Eames could not have been accepted as a suitor by their pet. Mrs. Dale and Bell both felt that. And yet they loved him for his love, and for that distant, modest respect which had restrained him from any speech regarding it. Poor Johnny! But he was young,—hardly as yet out of his hobbledehoyhood,—and he would easily recover this blow, remembering, and perhaps feeling to his advantage, some slight touch of its passing romance. It is thus women think of men who love young and love in vain.

But Johnny Eames himself, as he rode back to Guestwick, forgetful of his spurs, and with his gloves stuffed into his pocket, thought of the matter very differently. He had never promised to himself any success as to his

passion for Lily, and had, indeed, always acknowledged that he could have no hope; but now, that she was actually promised to another man, and as good as married, he was not the less broken-hearted because his former hopes had not been high. He had never dared to speak to Lily of his love, but he was conscious that she knew it, and he did not now dare to stand before her as one convicted of having loved in vain. And then, as he rode back, he thought also of his other love, not with many of those pleasant thoughts which Lotharios and Don Juans may be presumed to enjoy when they contemplate their successes. "I suppose I shall marry her, and there'll be an end of me," he said to himself, as he remembered a short note which he had once written to her in his madness. There had been a little supper at Mrs. Roper's, and Mrs. Lupex and Amelia had made the punch. After supper, he had been by some accident alone with Amelia in the dining-parlour; and when, warmed by the generous god, he had declared his passion, she had shaken her head mournfully, and had fled from him to some upper region, absolutely refusing his proffered embrace. But on the same night, before his head had found its pillow, a note had come to him, half repentant, half affectionate, half repellent,—"If, indeed, he would swear to her that his love was honest and manly, then, indeed, she might even yet,——see him through the chink of the doorway with the purport of telling him that he was forgiven." Whereupon, a perfidious pencil being near to his hand, he had written the requisite words. "My only object in life is to call you my own for ever." Amelia had her misgivings whether such a promise, in order that it might be used as legal evidence, should not have been written in ink. It was a painful doubt; but nevertheless she was as good as her word, and saw him through the chink, forgiving him for his impetuosity in the parlour with, perhaps, more clemency than a mere pardon required. "By George! how well she looked with her hair all loose," he said to himself, as he at last regained his pillow, still warm with the

generous god. But now, as he thought of that night, returning on his road from Allington to Guestwick, those loose, floating locks were remembered by him with no strong feeling as to their charms. And he thought also of Lily Dale, as she was when he had said farewell to her on that day before he first went up to London. "I shall care more about seeing you than anybody," he had said; and he had often thought of the words since, wondering whether she had understood them as meaning more than an assurance of ordinary friendship. And he remembered well the dress she had then worn. It was an old brown merino, which he had known before, and which, in truth, had nothing in it to recommend it specially to a lover's notice. "Horrid old thing!" had been Lily's own verdict respecting the frock, even before that day. But she had hallowed it in his eyes, and he would have been only too happy to have worn a shred of it near his heart, as a talisman. How wonderful in its nature is that passion of which men speak when they acknowledge to themselves that they are in love. Of all things, it is, under one condition, the most foul, and under another, the most fair. As that condition is, a man shows himself either as a beast or as a god! And so we will let poor Johnny Eames ride back to Guestwick, suffering much in that he had loved basely—and suffering much, also, in that he had loved nobly.

Lily, as she had tripped along through the shrubbery, under her lover's arm, looking up, every other moment, into his face, had espied her uncle and Bernard. "Stop," she had said, giving him a little pull at the arm; "I won't go on. Uncle is always teasing me with some old-fashioned wit. And I've had quite enough of you to-day, sir. Mind you come over to-morrow before you go to your shooting." And so she had left him.

We may as well learn here what was the question in dispute between the uncle and cousin, as they were walking there on the broad gravel path behind the Great House. "Bernard," the old man had said, "I

wish this matter could be settled between you and Bell."

"Is there any hurry about it, sir?"

"Yes, there is hurry; or, rather, as I hate hurry in all things, I would say that there is ground for despatch. Mind, I do not wish to drive you. If you do not like your cousin, say so."

"But I do like her; only I have a sort of feeling that these things grow best by degrees. I quite share your dislike to being in a hurry."

"But time enough has been taken now. You see, Bernard, I am going to make a great sacrifice of income on your behalf."

"I am sure I am very grateful."

"I have no children, and have therefore always regarded you as my own. But there is no reason why my brother Philip's daughter should not be as dear to me as my brother Orlando's son."

"Of course not, sir; or, rather, his two daughters."

"You may leave that matter to me, Bernard. The younger girl is going to marry this friend of yours, and as he has a sufficient income to support a wife, I think that my sister-in-law has good reason to be satisfied by the match. She will not be expected to give up any part of her small income, as she must have done had Lily married a poor man."

"I suppose she could hardly give up much."

"People must be guided by circumstances. I am not disposed to put myself in the place of a parent to them both. There is no reason why I should, and I will not encourage false hopes. If I knew that this matter between you and Bell was arranged, I should have reason to feel satisfied with what I was doing." From all which Bernard began to perceive that poor Crosbie's expectations in the matter of money would not probably receive much gratification. But he also perceived—or thought that he perceived—a kind of threat in this warning from his uncle. "I have promised you eight hundred a year with your wife," the warning seemed to say. "But if you do not at once

accept it, or let me feel that it will be accepted, it may be well for me to change my mind—especially as this other niece is about to be married. If I am to give you so large a fortune with Bell, I need do nothing for Lily. But if you do not choose to take Bell and the fortune, why then——" And so on. It was thus that Bernard read his uncle's caution, as they walked together on the broad gravel path.

"I have no desire to postpone the matter any longer," said Bernard. "I will propose to Bell at once, if you wish it."

"If your mind be quite made up, I cannot see why you should delay it."

And then, having thus arranged that matter, they received their future relative with kind smiles and soft words.

CHAPTER VII

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLES

Lily, as she parted with her lover in the garden, had required of him to attend upon her the next morning as he went to his shooting, and in obedience to this command he appeared on Mrs. Dale's lawn after breakfast, accompanied by Bernard and two dogs. The men had guns in their hands, and were got up with all proper sporting appurtenances, but it so turned out that they did not reach the stubble-fields on the farther side of the road until after luncheon. And may it not be fairly doubted whether croquet is not as good as shooting when a man is in love?

It will be said that Bernard Dale was not in love; but they who bring such accusation against him, will bring it falsely. He was in love with his cousin Bell according to his manner and fashion. It was not his nature to love Bell as John Eames loved Lily; but then neither would his nature bring him into such a trouble as that which the charms of Amelia Roper had

brought upon the poor clerk from the Income-tax Office. Johnny was susceptible, as the word goes; whereas Captain Dale was a man who had his feelings well under control. He was not one to make a fool of himself about a girl, or to die of a broken heart; but, nevertheless, he would probably love his wife when he got a wife, and would be a careful father to his children.

They were very intimate with each other now,—these four. It was Bernard and Adolphus, or sometimes Apollo, and Bell and Lily among them; and Crosbie found it to be pleasant enough. A new position of life had come upon him, and one exceeding pleasant; but, nevertheless, there were moments in which cold fits of a melancholy nature came upon him. He was doing the very thing which throughout all the years of his manhood he had declared to himself that he would not do. According to his plan of life he was to have eschewed marriage, and to have allowed himself to regard it as a possible event only under the circumstances of wealth, rank, and beauty all coming in his way together. As he had expected no such glorious prize, he had regarded himself as a man who would reign at the Beaufort and be potent at Sebright's to the end of his chapter. But now——

It was the fact that he had fallen from his settled position, vanquished by a silver voice, a pretty wit, and a pair of moderately bright eyes. He was very fond of Lily, having in truth a stronger capability for falling in love than his friend Captain Dale; but was the sacrifice worth his while? This was the question which he asked himself in those melancholy moments; while he was lying in bed, for instance, awake in the morning, when he was shaving himself, and sometimes also when the squire was prosy after dinner. At such times as these, while he would be listening to Mr. Dale, his self-reproaches would sometimes be very bitter. Why should he undergo this, he, Crosbie of Sebright's, Crosbie of the General Committee Office, Crosbie who would allow no one to bore him between Charing Cross and the far end of Bayswater,—why should he listen to

the long-winded stories of such a one as Squire Dale? If, indeed, the squire intended to be liberal to his niece, then it might be very well. But as yet the squire had given no sign of such intention, and Crosbie was angry with himself in that he had not had the courage to ask a question on that subject.

And thus the course of love was not all smooth to our Apollo. It was still pleasant for him when he was there on the croquet ground, or sitting in Mrs. Dale's drawing-room with all the privileges of an accepted lover. It was pleasant to him also as he sipped the squire's claret, knowing that his coffee would soon be handed to him by a sweet girl who would have tripped across the two gardens on purpose to perform for him this service. There is nothing pleasanter than all this, although a man when so treated does feel himself to look like a calf at the altar, ready for the knife, with blue ribbons round his horns and neck. Crosbie felt that he was such a calf,—and the more calf-like, in that he had not as yet dared to ask a question about his wife's fortune. "I will have it out of the old fellow this evening," he said to himself, as he buttoned on his dandy shooting gaiters that morning.

"How nice he looks in them," Lily said to her sister afterwards, knowing nothing of the thoughts which had troubled her lover's mind while he was adorning his legs.

"I suppose we shall come back this way," Crosbie said, as they prepared to move away on their proper business when lunch was over.

"Well, not exactly!" said Bernard. "We shall make our way round by Darvell's farm, and so back by Gruddock's. Are the girls going to dine up at the Great House to-day?"

The girls declared that they were not going to dine up at the Great House,—that they did not intend going to the Great House at all that evening.

"Then, as you won't have to dress, you might as well meet us at Gruddock's gate, at the back of the farmyard. We'll be there exactly at half-past five."

"That is to say, we're to be there at half-past five, and you'll keep us waiting for three-quarters of an hour," said Lily. Nevertheless the arrangement as proposed was made, and the two ladies were not at all unwilling to make it. It is thus that the game is carried on among unsophisticated people who really live in the country. The farmyard gate at Farmer Gruddock's has not a fitting sound as a trysting-place in romance, but for people who are in earnest it does as well as any oak in the middle glade of a forest. Lily Dale was quite in earnest—and so indeed was Adolphus Crosbie,—only with him the earnest was beginning to take that shade of brown which most earnest things have to wear in this vale of tears. With Lily it was as yet all rose-coloured. And Bernard Dale was also in earnest. Throughout this morning he had stood very near to Bell on the lawn, and had thought that his cousin did not receive his little whisperings with any aversion. Why should she? Lucky girl that she was, thus to have eight hundred a year pinned to her skirt!

"I say, Dale," Crosbie said, as in the course of their day's work they had come round upon Gruddock's ground, and were preparing to finish off his turnips before they reached the farmyard gate. And now, as Crosbie spoke, they stood leaning on the gate, looking at the turnips while the two dogs squatted on their haunches. Crosbie had been very silent for the last mile or two, and had been making up his mind for this conversation. "I say, Dale,—your uncle has never said a word to me yet as to Lily's fortune."

"As to Lily's fortune! The question is whether Lily has got a fortune."

"He can hardly expect that I am to take her without something. Your uncle is a man of the world and he knows——"

"Whether or no my uncle is a man of the world, I will not say; but you are, Crosbie, whether he is or not. Lily, as you have always known, has nothing of her own."

"I am not talking of Lily's own. I'm speaking of her uncle. I have been straightforward with him; and when I became attached to your cousin I declared what I meant at once."

"You should have asked him the question, if you thought there was any room for such a question."

"Thought there was any room! Upon my word, you are a cool fellow."

"Now look here, Crosbie; you may say what you like about my uncle, but you must not say a word against Lily."

"Who is going to say a word against her? You can little understand me if you don't know that the protection of her name against evil words is already more my care than it is yours. I regard Lily as my own."

"I only meant to say, that any discontent you may feel as to her money, or want of money, you must refer to my uncle, and not to the family at the Small House."

"I am quite well aware of that."

"And though you are quite at liberty to say what you like to me about my uncle, I cannot say that I can see that he has been to blame."

"He should have told me what her prospects are."

"But if she have got no prospects! It cannot be an uncle's duty to tell everybody that he does not mean to give his niece a fortune. In point of fact, why should you suppose that he has such an intention?"

"Do you know that he has not? because you once led me to believe that he would give his niece money."

"Now, Crosbie, it is necessary that you and I should understand each other in this matter——"

"But did you not?"

"Listen to me for a moment. I never said a word to you about my uncle's intentions in any way, until after you had become fully engaged to Lily with the knowledge of us all. Then, when my belief on the subject could make no possible difference in your conduct, I told you that I thought my uncle would do

something for her. I told you so because I did think so;—and as your friend, I should have told you what I thought in any matter that concerned your interest."

"And now you have changed your opinion?"

"I have changed my opinion; but very probably without sufficient ground."

"That's hard upon me."

"It may be hard to bear disappointment; but you cannot say that anybody has ill-used you."

"And you don't think he will give her anything?"

"Nothing that will be of much moment to you."

"And I'm not to say that that's hard? I think it confounded hard. Of course, I must put off my marriage."

"Why do you not speak to my uncle?"

"I shall do so. To tell the truth, I think it would have come better from him; but that is a matter of opinion. I shall tell him very plainly what I think about it; and if he is angry, why, I suppose I must leave his house; that will be all."

"Look here, Crosbie; do not begin your conversation with the purpose of angering him. He is not a bad-hearted man, but is very obstinate."

"I can be quite as obstinate as he is." And then, without further parley, they went in among the turnips, and each swore against his luck as he missed the birds. There are certain phases of mind in which a man can neither ride nor shoot, nor play a stroke at billiards, nor remember a card at whist,—and to such a phase of mind had come both Crosbie and Dale after their conversation over the gate.

They were not above fifteen minutes late at the trysting-place, but nevertheless, punctual though they had been, the girls were there before them. Of course the first inquiries were made about the game, and of course the gentlemen declared that the birds were scarcer than they had ever been before, that the dogs were wilder, and their luck more excruciatingly bad,—to all which apologies very little attention was paid.

Lily and Bell had not come there to inquire after partridges, and would have forgiven the sportsmen even though no single bird had been killed. But they could not forgive the want of good spirits which was apparent.

"I declare I don't know what's the matter with you," Lily said to her lover.

"We have been over fifteen miles of ground, and——"

"I never knew anything so lackadaisical as you gentlemen from London. Been over fifteen miles of ground! Why, uncle Christopher would think nothing of that."

"Uncle Christopher is made of sterner stuff than we are," said Crosbie. "They used to be born so sixty or seventy years ago." And then they walked on through Gruddock's fields, and the home paddocks, back to the Great House, where they found the squire standing in the front of the porch.

The walk had not been so pleasant as they had all intended that it should be when they made their arrangements for it. Crosbie had endeavoured to recover his happy state of mind, but had been unsuccessful; and Lily, fancying that her lover was not all that he should be, had become reserved and silent. Bernard and Bell had not shared this discomfiture, but then Bernard and Bell were, as a rule, much more given to silence than the other two.

"Uncle," said Lily, "these men have shot nothing, and you cannot conceive how unhappy they are in consequence. It's all the fault of the naughty partridges."

"There are plenty of partridges if they knew how to get them," said the squire.

"The dogs are uncommonly wild," said Crosbie.

"They are not wild with me," said the squire; "nor yet with Dingles." Dingles was the squire's gamekeeper. "The fact is, you young men, now-a-days, expect to have dogs trained to do all the work for you. It's too much labour for you to walk up to your

game. You'll be late for dinner, girls, if you don't look sharp."

"We're not coming up this evening, sir," said Bell.

"And why not?"

"We're going to stay with mamma."

"And why will not your mother come with you? I'll be whipped if I can understand it. One would have thought that under the present circumstances she would have been glad to see you all as much together as possible."

"We're together quite enough," said Lily. "And as for mamma, I suppose she thinks——" And then she stopped herself, catching the glance of Bell's imploring eye. She was going to make some indignant excuse for her mother,—some excuse which would be calculated to make her uncle angry. It was her practice to say such sharp words to him, and consequently he did not regard her as warmly as her more silent and more prudent sister. At the present moment he turned quickly round and went into the house; and then, with a very few words of farewell, the two young men followed him. The girls went back over the little bridge by themselves, feeling that the afternoon had not gone off altogether well.

"You shouldn't provoke him, Lily," said Bell.

"And he shouldn't say those things about mamma. It seems to me that you don't mind what he says."

"Oh, Lily."

"No more you do. He makes me so angry that I cannot hold my tongue. He thinks that because all the place is his, he is to say just what he likes. Why should mamma go up there to please his humours?"

"You may be sure that mamma will do what she thinks best. She is stronger-minded than uncle Christopher, and does not want any one to help her. But, Lily, you shouldn't speak as though I were careless about mamma. You didn't mean that, I know."

"Of course I didn't." Then the two girls joined their mother in their own little domain; but we will return to the men at the Great House.

Crosbie, when he went up to dress for dinner, fell into one of those melancholy fits of which I have spoken. Was he absolutely about to destroy all the good that he had done for himself throughout the past years of his hitherto successful life? or rather, as he at last put the question to himself more strongly,—was it not the case that he had already destroyed all that success? His marriage with Lily, whether it was to be for good or bad, was now a settled thing, and was not regarded as a matter admitting of any doubt. To do the man justice, I must declare that in all these moments of misery he still did the best he could to think of Lily herself as of a great treasure which he had won,—as of a treasure which should, and perhaps would, compensate him for his misery. But there was the misery very plain. He must give up his clubs, and his fashion, and all that he had hitherto gained, and be content to live a plain, humdrum, domestic life, with eight hundred a year, and a small house, full of babies. It was not the kind of Elysium for which he had tutored himself. Lily was very nice, very nice indeed. She was, as he said to himself, "by odds, the nicest girl that he had ever seen." Whatever might now turn up, her happiness should be his first care. But as for his own,—he began to fear that the compensation would hardly be perfect. "It is my own doing," he said to himself, intending to be rather noble in the purport of his soliloquy, "I have trained myself for other things,—very foolishly. Of course I must suffer,—suffer damnably. But she shall never know it. Dear, sweet, innocent, pretty little thing!" And then he went on about the squire, as to whom he felt himself entitled to be indignant by his own disinterested and manly line of conduct towards the niece. "But I will let him know what I think about it," he said. "It's all very well for Dale to say that I have been treated fairly. It isn't fair for a man to put forward his niece under false pretences. Of course I thought that he intended to provide for her." And then, having made up his mind in a very manly

way that he would not desert Lily altogether after having promised to marry her, he endeavoured to find consolation in the reflection that he might, at any rate, allow himself two years' more run as a bachelor in London. Girls who have to get themselves married without fortunes always know that they will have to wait. Indeed, Lily had already told him, that as far as she was concerned, she was in no hurry. He need not, therefore, at once withdraw his name from Sebright's. Thus he endeavoured to console himself, still, however, resolving that he would have a little serious conversation with the squire that very evening as to Lily's fortune.

And what was the state of Lily's mind at the same moment, while she, also, was performing some slight toilet changes preparatory to their simple dinner at the Small House?

"I didn't behave well to him," she said to herself; "I never do. I forget how much he is giving up for me; and then, when anything annoys him, I make it worse instead of comforting him." And upon that she made accusation against herself that she did not love him half enough,—that she did not let him see how thoroughly and perfectly she loved him. She had an idea of her own, that as a girl should never show any preference for a man till circumstances should have fully entitled him to such manifestation, so also should she make no drawback on her love, but pour it forth for his benefit with all her strength, when such circumstances had come to exist. But she was ever feeling that she was not acting up to her theory, now that the time for such practice had come. She would unwittingly assume little reserves, and make small pretences of indifference in spite of her own judgment. She had done so on this afternoon, and had left him without giving him her hand to press, without looking up into his face with an assurance of love, and therefore she was angry with herself. "I know I shall teach him to hate me," she said out aloud to Bell.

"That would be very sad," said Bell; "but I don't see it."

"If you were engaged to a man you would be much better to him. You would not say so much, but what you did say would be all affection. I am always making horrid little speeches, for which I should like to cut out my tongue afterwards."

"Whatever sort of speeches they are, I think that he likes them."

"Does he? I'm not all so sure of that, Bell. Of course I don't expect that he is to scold me,—not yet, that is. But I know by his eye when he is pleased and when he is displeased."

And then they went down to their dinner.

Up at the Great House the three gentlemen met together in apparent good humour. Bernard Dale was a man of an equal temperament, who rarely allowed any feeling, or even any annoyance, to interfere with his usual manner,—a man who could always come to table with a smile, and meet either his friend or his enemy with a properly civil greeting. Not that he was especially a false man. There was nothing of deceit in his placidity of demeanour. It arose from true equanimity; but it was the equanimity of a cold disposition rather than of one well ordered by discipline. The squire was aware that he had been unreasonably petulant before dinner, and having taken himself to task in his own way, now entered the dining-room with the courteous greeting of a host. "I find that your bag was not so bad after all," he said, "and I hope that your appetite is at least as good as your bag."

Crosbie smiled, and made himself pleasant, and said a few flattering words. A man who intends to take some very decided step in an hour or two generally contrives to bear himself in the meantime as though the trifles of the world were quite sufficient for him. So he praised the squire's game; said a good-natured word as to Dingles, and bantered himself as to his own want of skill. Then all went merry,—not quite

as a marriage bell; but still merry enough for a party of three gentlemen.

But Crosbie's resolution was fixed; and as soon, therefore, as the old butler was permanently gone, and the wine steadily in transit upon the table, he began his task, not without some apparent abruptness. Having fully considered the matter, he had determined that he would not wait for Bernard Dale's absence. He thought it possible that he might be able to fight his battle better in Bernard's presence than he could do behind his back.

"Squire," he began. They all called him squire when they were on good terms together, and Crosbie thought it well to begin as though there was nothing amiss between them. "Squire, of course I am thinking a good deal at the present moment as to my intended marriage."

"That's natural enough," said the squire.

"Yes, by George! sir, a man doesn't make a change like that without finding that he has got something to think of."

"I suppose not," said the squire. "I never was in the way of getting married myself, but I can easily understand that."

"I've been the luckiest fellow in the world in finding such a girl as your niece——" Whereupon the squire bowed, intending to make a little courteous declaration that the luck in the matter was on the side of the Dales. "I know that," continued Crosbie. "She is exactly everything that a girl ought to be."

"She is a good girl," said Bernard.

"Yes; I think she is," said the squire.

"But it seems to me, said Crosbie, finding that it was necessary to dash at once headlong into the water, "that something ought to be said as to my means of supporting her properly."

Then he paused for a moment, expecting that the squire would speak. But the squire sat perfectly still, looking intently at the empty fireplace, and saying nothing. "Of supporting her," continued Crosbie,

"with all those comforts to which she has been accustomed."

"She has never been used to expense," said the squire. "Her mother, as you doubtless know, is not a rich woman."

"But living here, Lily has had great advantages,—a horse to ride, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't suppose she expects a horse in the park," said the squire, with a very perceptible touch of sarcasm in his voice.

"I hope not," said Crosbie.

"I believe she has had the use of one of the ponies here sometimes, but I hope that has not made her extravagant in her ideas. I did not think that there was anything of that nonsense about either of them."

"Nor is there,—as far as I know."

"Nothing of the sort," said Bernard.

"But the long and the short of it is this, sir!" and Crosbie, as he spoke, endeavoured to maintain his ordinary voice and usual coolness, but his heightened colour betrayed that he was nervous. "Am I to expect any accession of income with my wife?"

"I have not spoken to my sister-in-law on the subject," said the squire; "but I should fear that she cannot do much."

"As a matter of course, I would not take a shilling from her," said Crosbie.

"Then that settles it," said the squire.

Crosbie paused a moment, during which his colour became very red. He unconsciously took up an apricot and ate it, and then he spoke out. "Of course I was not alluding to Mrs. Dale's income; I would not, on any account, disturb her arrangements. But I wished to learn, sir, whether you intended to do anything for your niece."

"In the way of giving her a fortune? Nothing at all. I intend to do nothing at all."

"Then I suppose we understand each other,—at last," said Crosbie.

"I should have thought that we might have understood each other at first," said the squire. "Did I ever make you any promise, or give you any hint that I intended to provide for my niece? Have I ever held out to you any such hope? I don't know what you mean by that word 'at last'—unless it be to give offence."

"I meant the truth, sir;—I meant this—that seeing the manner in which your nieces lived with you, I thought it probable that you would treat them both as though they were your daughters. Now I find out my mistake;—that is all!"

"You have been mistaken,—and without a shadow of excuse for your mistake."

"Others have been mistaken with me," said Crosbie, forgetting, on the spur of the moment, that he had no right to drag the opinion of any other person into the question.

"What others?" said the squire, with anger; and his mind immediately betook itself to his sister-in-law.

"I do not want to make any mischief," said Crosbie.

"If anybody connected with my family has presumed to tell you that I intended to do more for my niece Lilian than I have already done, such person has not only been false, but ungrateful. I have given to no one any authority to make any promise on behalf of my niece."

"No such promise has been made. It was only a suggestion," said Crosbie.

He was not in the least aware to whom the squire was alluding in his anger; but he perceived that his host was angry, and having already reflected that he should not have alluded to the words which Bernard Dale had spoken in his friendship, he resolved to name no one. Bernard, as he sat by listening, knew exactly how the matter stood; but, as he thought, there could be no reason why he should subject himself to his uncle's ill-will, seeing that he had committed no sin.

"No such suggestion should have been made," said the squire. "No one has had a right to make such a suggestion. No one has been placed by me in a position to make such a suggestion to you without manifest impropriety. I will ask no further questions about it; but it is quite as well that you should understand at once that I do not consider it to be my duty to give my niece Lilian a fortune on her marriage. I trust that your offer to her was not made under any such delusion."

"No, sir; it was not," said Crosbie.

"Then I suppose that no great harm has been done. I am sorry if false hopes have been given to you; but I am sure you will acknowledge that they were not given to you by me."

"I think you have misunderstood me, sir. My hopes were never very high; but I thought it right to ascertain your intentions."

"Now you know them. I trust, for the girl's sake, that it will make no difference to her. I can hardly believe that she has been to blame in the matter."

Crosbie hastened at once to exculpate Lily; and then, with more awkward blunders than a man should have made who was so well acquainted with fashionable life as the Apollo of the Beaufort, he proceeded to explain that, as Lily was to have nothing, his own pecuniary arrangements would necessitate some little delay in their marriage.

"As far as I myself am concerned," said the squire, "I do not like long engagements. But I am quite aware that in this matter I have no right to interfere, unless, indeed——" and then he stopped himself.

"I suppose it will be well to fix some day; eh, Crosbie?" said Bernard.

"I will discuss that matter with Mrs. Dale," said Crosbie.

"If you and she understand each other," said the squire, "that will be sufficient. Shall we go into the drawing-room now, or out upon the lawn?"

That evening, as Crosbie went to bed, he felt that he had not gained the victory in his encounter with the squire.

CHAPTER VIII

IT CANNOT BE

On the following morning at breakfast each of the three gentlemen at the Great House received a little note on pink paper, nominally from Mrs. Dale, asking them to drink tea at the Small House on that day week. At the bottom of the note which Lily had written for Mr. Crosbie was added: "Dancing on the lawn, if we can get anybody to stand up. Of course you must come, whether you like it or not. And Bernard also. Do your possible to talk my uncle into coming." And this note did something towards re-creating good-humour among them at the breakfast-table. It was shown to the squire, and at last he was brought to say that he would perhaps go to Mrs. Dale's little evening-party.

It may be well to explain that this promised entertainment had been originated with no special view to the pleasure of Mr. Crosbie, but altogether on behalf of poor Johnny Eames. What was to be done in that matter? This question had been fully discussed between Mrs. Dale and Bell, and they had come to the conclusion that it would be best to ask Johnny over to a little friendly gathering, in which he might be able to meet Lily with some strangers around them. In this way his embarrassment might be overcome. It would never do, as Mrs. Dale said, that he should be suffered to stay away, unnoticed by them. "When the ice is once broken he won't mind it," said Bell. And, therefore, early in the day, a messenger was sent over to Guestwick, who returned with a note from Mrs. Eames, saying that she would

come on the evening in question, with her son and daughter. They would keep the fly and get back to Guestwick the same evening. This was added, as an offer had been made of beds for Mrs. Eames and Mary.

Before the evening of the party another memorable occurrence had taken place at Allington, which must be described, in order that the feelings of the different people on that evening may be understood. The squire had given his nephew to understand that he wished to have that matter settled as to his niece Bell; and as Bernard's views were altogether in accordance with the squire's, he resolved to comply with his uncle's wishes. The project with him was not a new thing. He did love his cousin quite sufficiently for purposes of matrimony, and was minded that it would be a good thing for him to marry. He could not marry without money, but this marriage would give him an income without the trouble of intricate settlements, or the interference of lawyers hostile to his own interests. It was possible that he might do better; but then it was possible also that he might do much worse; and, in addition to this, he was fond of his cousin. He discussed the matter within himself, very calmly; made some excellent resolutions as to the kind of life which it would behove him to live as a married man; settled on the street in London in which he would have his house, and behaved very prettily to Bell for four or five days running. That he did not make love to her, in the ordinary sense of the word, must, I suppose, be taken for granted, seeing that Bell herself did not recognize the fact. She had always liked her cousin, and thought that in these days he was making himself particularly agreeable.

On the evening before the party the girls were at the Great House, having come up nominally with the intention of discussing the expediency of dancing on the lawn. Lily had made up her mind that it was to be so, but Bell had objected that it would be cold

and damp, and that the drawing-room would be nicer for dancing.

"You see we've only got four young gentlemen and one ungrown," said Lily; "and they will look so stupid standing up all properly in a room, as though we had a regular party."

"Thank you for the compliment," said Crosbie, taking off his straw hat.

"So you will; and we girls will look more stupid still. But out on the lawn it won't look stupid at all. Two or three might stand up on the lawn, and it would be jolly enough."

"I don't quite see it," said Bernard.

"Yes, I think I see it," said Crosbie. "The unadaptability of the lawn for the purpose of a ball——"

"Nobody is thinking of a ball," said Lily, with mock petulance.

"I'm defending you, and yet you won't let me speak. The unadaptability of the lawn for the purposes of a ball will conceal the insufficiency of four men and a boy as a supply of male dancers. But, Lily, who is the ungrown gentleman? Is it your old friend Johnny Eames?"

Lily's voice became sobered as she answered him. "Oh, no; I did not mean Mr. Eames. He is coming, but I did not mean him. Dick Boyce, Mr. Boyce's son, is only sixteen. He is the ungrown gentleman."

"And who is the fourth adult?"

"Dr. Crofts, from Guestwick. I do hope you will like him, Adolphus. We think he is the very perfection of a man."

"Then of course I shall hate him; and be very jealous, too!"

And then that pair went off together, fighting their own little battle on that head, as turtle-doves will sometimes do. They went off, and Bernard was left with Bell standing together over the ha-ha fence which divides the garden at the back of the house from the field.

"Bell," he said, "they seem very happy, don't they?"

"And they ought to be happy now, oughtn't they? Dear Lily! I hope he will be good to her. Do you know, Bernard, though he is your friend, I am very, very anxious about it. It is such a vast trust to put in a man when we do not quite know him."

"Yes, it is; but they'll do very well together. Lily will be happy enough."

"And he?"

"I suppose he'll be happy, too. He'll feel himself a little straightened as to income at first, but that will all come round."

"If he is not, she will be wretched."

"They will do very well. Lily must be prepared to make the money go as far as she can, that's all."

"Lily won't feel the want of money. It is not that. But if he lets her know that she has made him a poor man, then she will be unhappy. Is he extravagant, Bernard?"

But Bernard was anxious to discuss another subject, and therefore would not speak such words of wisdom as to Lily's engagement as might have been expected from him had he been in a different frame of mind.

"No, I should say not," said he. "But, Bell——"

"I do not know that we could have acted otherwise than we have done, and yet I fear that we have been rash. If he makes her unhappy, Bernard, I shall never forgive you."

But as she said this she put her hand lovingly upon his arm, as a cousin might do, and spoke in a tone which divested her threat of its acerbity.

"You must not quarrel with me, Bell, whatever may happen. I cannot afford to quarrel with you."

"Of course I was not in earnest as to that."

"You and I must never quarrel, Bell; at least, I hope not. I could bear to quarrel with any one rather than with you." And then, as he spoke, there was something in his voice which gave the girl some slight, indistinct warning of what might be his intention. Not

that she said to herself at once, that he was going to make her an offer of his hand,—now, on the spot; but she felt that he intended something beyond the tenderness of ordinary cousinly affection.

"I hope we shall never quarrel," she said. But as she spoke, her mind was settling itself,—forming its resolution, and coming to a conclusion, as to the sort of love which Bernard might, perhaps, expect. And it formed another conclusion; as to the sort of love which might be given in return.

"Bell," he said, "you and I have always been dear friends."

"Yes; always."

"Why should we not be something more than friends?"

To give Captain Dale his due I must declare that his voice was perfectly natural as he asked this question, and that he showed no signs of nervousness, either in his face or limbs. He had made up his mind to do it on that occasion, and he did it without any signs of outward disturbance. He asked his question, and then he waited for his answer. In this he was rather hard upon his cousin; for, though the question had certainly been asked in language that could not be mistaken, still the matter had not been put forward with all that fulness which a young lady, under such circumstances, has a right to expect.

They had sat down on the turf close to the ha-ha, and they were so near that Bernard was able to put out his hand with the view of taking that of his cousin within his own. But she contrived to keep her hands locked together, so that he merely held her gently by the wrist.

"I don't quite understand, Bernard," she said, after a minute's pause.

"Shall we be more than cousins? Shall we be man and wife?"

Now, at least, she could not say that she did not understand. If the question was ever asked plainly, Bernard Dale had asked it plainly. Shall we be man and wife? Few men, I fancy, dare to put it all at

once in so abrupt a way, and yet I do not know that the English language affords any better terms for the question.

"Oh, Bernard! you have surprised me."

"I hope I have not pained you, Bell. I have been long thinking of this, but I am well aware that my own manner, even to you, has not been that of a lover. It is not in me to smile and say soft things, as Crosbie can. But I do not love you the less on that account. I have looked about for a wife, and I have thought that if I could gain you I should be very fortunate."

He did not then say anything about his uncle, and the eight hundred a year; but he fully intended to do so as soon as an opportunity should serve. He was quite of opinion that eight hundred a year and the good-will of a rich uncle were strong grounds for matrimony,—were grounds even for love; and he did not doubt but his cousin would see the matter in the same light.

"You are very good to me—more than good. Of course I know that. But, oh, Bernard! I did not expect this a bit."

"But you will answer me, Bell! Or if you would like time to think, or to speak to my aunt, perhaps you will answer me to-morrow?"

"I think I ought to answer you now."

"Not if it be a refusal, Bell. Think well of it before you do that. I should have told you that our uncle wishes this match, and that he will remove any difficulty there might be about money."

"I do not care for money."

"But, as you were saying about Lily, one has to be prudent. Now, in our marriage, everything of that kind would be well arranged. My uncle has promised me that he would at once allow us——"

"Stop, Bernard. You must not be led to suppose that any offer made by my uncle would help to purchase —— Indeed, there can be no need for us to talk about money."

"I wished to let you know the facts of the case, exactly as they are. And as to our uncle, I cannot but think that you would be glad, in such a matter, to have him on your side."

"Yes, I should be glad to have him on my side; that is, if I were going—— But my uncle's wishes could not influence my decision. The fact is, Bernard ——"

"Well, dearest, what is the fact?"

"I have always regarded you rather as a brother than as anything else."

"But that regard may be changed."

"No; I think not. Bernard, I will go further and speak on at once. It cannot be changed. I know myself well enough to say that with certainty. It cannot be changed."

"You mean that you cannot love me?"

"Not as you would have me do. I do love you very dearly,—very dearly, indeed. I would go to you in any trouble, exactly as I would go to a brother."

"And must that be all, Bell?"

"Is not that all the sweetest love that can be felt? But you must not think me ungrateful, or proud. I know well that you are—are proposing to do for me much more than I deserve. Any girl might be proud of such an offer. But, dear Bernard——"

"Bell, before you give me a final answer, sleep upon this and talk it over with your mother. Of course you were unprepared, and I cannot expect that you should promise me so much without a moment's consideration."

"I was unprepared, and therefore I have not answered you as I should have done. But as it has gone so far, I cannot let you leave me in uncertainty. It is not necessary that I should keep you waiting. In this matter I do know my own mind. Dear Bernard, indeed, indeed it cannot be as you have proposed."

She spoke in a low voice, and in a tone that had in it something of almost imploring humility; but, never-

theless, it conveyed to her cousin an assurance that she was in earnest; an assurance also that that earnest would not readily be changed. Was she not a Dale? And when did a Dale change his mind? For a while he sat silent by her; and she too, having declared her intention, refrained from further words. For some minutes they thus remained, looking down into the ha-ha. She still kept her old position, holding her hands clasped together over her knees; but he was now lying on his side, supporting his head upon his arm, with his face indeed turned towards her, but with his eyes fixed upon the grass. During this time, however, he was not idle. His cousin's answer, though it had grieved him, had not come upon him as a blow stunning him for a moment, and rendering him unfit for instant thought. He was grieved, more grieved than he had thought he would have been. The thing that he had wanted moderately, he now wanted the more in that it was denied to him. But he was able to perceive the exact truth of his position, and to calculate what might be his chances if he went on with his suit, and what his advantage if he at once abandoned it.

"I do not wish to press you unfairly, Bell; but may I ask if any other preference——"

"There is no other preference," she answered. And then again they were silent for a minute or two.

"My uncle will be much grieved at this," he said at last.

"If that be all," said Bell, "I do not think that we need either of us trouble ourselves. He can have no right to dispose of our hearts."

"I understand the taunt, Bell."

"Dear Bernard, there was no taunt. I intended none."

"I need not speak of my own grief. You cannot but know how deep it must be. Why should I have submitted myself to this mortification had not my heart been concerned? But that I will bear, if I must bear it——" And then he paused, looking up at her.

"It will soon pass away," she said.

"I will accept it at any rate without complaint. But as to my uncle's feelings, it is open to me to speak, and to you, I should think, to listen without indifference. He has been kind to us both, and loves us two above any other living beings. It's not surprising that he should wish to see us married, and it will not be surprising if your refusal should be a great blow to him."

"I shall be sorry—very sorry."

"I also shall be sorry. I am now speaking of him. He has set his heart upon it; and as he has but few wishes, few desires, so is he the more constant in those which he expresses. When he knows this, I fear that we shall find him very stern."

"Then he will be unjust."

"No; he will not be unjust. He is always a just man. But he will be unhappy, and will, I fear, make others unhappy. Dear Bell, may not this thing remain for a while unsettled? You will not find that I take advantage of your goodness. I will not intrude it on you again,—say for a fortnight,—or till Crosbie shall be gone."

"No, no, no," said Bell.

"Why are you so eager in your noes? There can be no danger in such delay. I will not press you,—and you can let my uncle think that you have at least taken time for consideration."

"There are things as to which one is bound to answer at once. If I doubted myself, I would let you persuade me. But I do not doubt myself, and I should be wrong to keep you in suspense. Dear, dearest Bernard, it cannot be; and as it cannot be, you, as my brother, would bid me say so clearly. It cannot be."

As she made this last assurance, they heard the steps of Lily and her lover close to them, and they both felt that it would be well that their intercourse should thus be brought to a close. Neither had known how to get up and leave the place, and yet each had felt that nothing further could then be said.

"Did you ever see anything so sweet and affectionate and romantic?" said Lily, standing over them and looking at them. "And all the while we have been so practical and worldly. Do you know, Bell, that Adolphus seems to think we can't very well keep pigs in London. It makes me so unhappy."

"It does seem a pity," said Crosbie, "for Lily seems to know all about pigs."

"Of course I do. I haven't lived in the country all my life for nothing. Oh, Bernard, I should so like to see you rolled down into the bottom of the ha-ha. Just remain there, and we'll do it between us."

Whereupon Bernard got up, as did Bell also, and they all went in to tea.

CHAPTER IX

MRS. DALE'S LITTLE PARTY

THE next day was the day of the party. Not a word more was said on that evening between Bell and her cousin, at least, not a word more of any peculiar note; and when Crosbie suggested to his friend on the following morning that they should both step down and see how the preparations were getting on at the Small House, Bernard declined.

"You forget, my dear fellow, that I'm not in love as you are," said he.

"But I thought you were," said Crosbie.

"No; not at all as you are. You are an accepted lover, and will be allowed to do anything,—whip the creams, and tune the piano, if you know how. I'm only a half sort of lover, meditating a mariage de convenance to oblige an uncle, and by no means required by the terms of my agreement to undergo a very rigid amount of drill. Your position is just the reverse." In saying all which Captain Dale was no doubt very false; but if falseness can be forgiven to a man in any position, it may be forgiven in that which

he then filled. So Crosbie went down to the Small House alone.

"Dale wouldn't come," said he, speaking to the three ladies together, "I suppose he's keeping himself up for the dance on the lawn."

"I hope he will be here in the evening," said Mrs. Dale. But Bell said never a word. She had determined, that under the existing circumstances, it would be only fair to her cousin that his offer and her answer to it should be kept secret. She knew why Bernard did not come across from the Great House with his friend, but she said nothing of her knowledge. Lily looked at her, but looked without speaking; and as for Mrs. Dale, she took no notice of the circumstance. Thus they passed the afternoon together without further mention of Bernard Dale; and it may be said, at any rate of Lily and Crosbie, that his presence was not missed.

Mrs. Eames, with her son and daughter, were the first to come. "It is so nice of you to come early," said Lily, trying on the spur of the moment to say something which should sound pleasant and happy, but in truth using that form of welcome which to my ears sounds always the most ungracious. "Ten minutes before the time named; and, of course, you must have understood that I meant thirty minutes after it!" That is my interpretation of the words when I am thanked for coming early. But Mrs. Eames was a kind, patient, unexacting woman, who took all civil words as meaning civility. And, indeed, Lily had meant nothing else.

"Yes; we did come early," said Mrs. Eames, "because Mary thought she would like to go up into the girls' room and just settle her hair, you know."

"So she shall," said Lily, who had taken Mary by the hand.

"And we knew we shouldn't be in the way. Johnny can go out into the garden if there's anything left to be done."

"He shan't be banished unless he likes it," said Mrs.

Dale. "If he finds us women too much for his unaided strength——"

John Eames muttered something about being very well as he was, and then got himself into an arm-chair. He had shaken hands with Lily, trying as he did so to pronounce articulately a little speech which he had prepared for the occasion. "I have to congratulate you, Lily, and I hope with all my heart that you will be happy." The words were simple enough, and were not ill-chosen, but the poor young man never got them spoken. The word "congratulate" did reach Lily's ears, and she understood it all;—both the kindness of the intended speech and the reason why it could not be spoken.

"Thank you, John," she said; "I hope I shall see so much of you in London. It will be so nice to have an old Guestwick friend near me." She had her own voice, and the pulses of her heart better under command than had he; but she also felt that the occasion was trying to her. The man had loved her honestly and truly,—still did love her, paying her the great homage of bitter grief in that he had lost her. Where is the girl who will not sympathize with such love and such grief, if it be shown only because it cannot be concealed, and be declared against the will of him who declares it?

Then came in old Mrs. Hearn, whose cottage was not distant two minutes' walk from the Small House. She always called Mrs. Dale "my dear," and petted the girls as though they had been children. When told of Lily's marriage, she had thrown up her hands with surprise, for she had still left in some corner of her drawers remnants of sugar-plums which she had bought for Lily. "A London man is he? Well, well. I wish he lived in the country. Eight hundred a year, my dear?" she had said to Mrs. Dale. "That sounds nice down here, because we are all so poor. But I suppose eight hundred a year isn't very much up in London?"

"The squire's coming, I suppose, isn't he?" said

Mrs. Hearn, as she seated herself on the sofa close to Mrs. Dale.

"Yes, he'll be here by-and-by; unless he changes his mind, you know. He doesn't stand on ceremony with me."

"He change his mind! When did you ever know Christopher Dale change his mind?"

"He is pretty constant, Mrs. Hearn."

"If he promised to give a man a penny, he'd give it. But if he promised to take away a pound, he'd take it, though it cost him years to get it. He's going to turn me out of my cottage, he says."

"Nonsense, Mrs. Hearn!"

"Jolliffe came and told me"—Jolliffe, I should explain, was the bailiff—"that if I didn't like it as it was, I might leave it, and that the squire could get double the rent for it. Now all I asked was that he should do a little painting in the kitchen; and the wood is all as black as his hat."

"I thought it was understood you were to paint inside."

"How can I do it, my dear, with a hundred and forty pounds for everything? I must live, you know! And he that has workmen about him every day of the year! And was that a message to send to me, who have lived in the parish for fifty years? Here he is." And Mrs. Hearn majestically raised herself from her seat as the squire entered the room.

With him entered Mr. and Mrs. Boyce, from the parsonage, with Dick Boyce, the ungrown gentleman, and two girl Boyces, who were fourteen and fifteen years of age. Mrs. Dale, with the amount of good-nature usual on such occasions, asked reproachfully why Jane, and Charles, and Florence, and Bessy, did not come,—Boyce being a man who had his quiver full of them,—and Mrs. Boyce, giving the usual answer, declared that she already felt that they had come as an avalanche.

"But where are the—the—the young men?" asked Lily, assuming a look of mock astonishment.

"They'll be across in two or three hours' time," said the squire. "They both dressed for dinner, and, as I thought, made themselves very smart; but for such a grand occasion as this they thought a second dressing necessary. How do you do, Mrs. Hearn? I hope you are quite well. No rheumatism left, eh?" This the squire said very loud into Mrs. Hearn's ear. Mrs. Hearn was perhaps a little hard of hearing; but it was very little, and she hated to be thought deaf. She did not, moreover, like to be thought rheumatic. This the squire knew, and therefore his mode of address was not good-natured.

"You needn't make me jump so, Mr. Dale. I'm pretty well now, thank ye. I did have a twinge in the spring,—that cottage is so badly built for draughts! 'I wonder you can live in it,' my sister said to me the last time she was over. I suppose I should be better off over with her at Hamersham, only one doesn't like to move, you know, after living fifty years in one parish."

"You mustn't think of going away from us," Mrs. Boyce said, speaking by no means loud, but slowly and plainly, hoping thereby to flatter the old woman. But the old woman understood it all. "She's a sly creature, is Mrs. Boyce," Mrs. Hearn said to Mrs. Dale, before the evening was out. There are some old people whom it is very hard to flatter, and with whom it is, nevertheless, almost impossible to live unless you do flatter them.

At last the two heroes came in across the lawn at the drawing-room window; and Lily, as they entered, dropped a low curtsey before them, gently swelling down upon the ground with her light muslin dress, till she looked like some wondrous flower that had bloomed upon the carpet, and putting her two hands, with the backs of her fingers pressed together, on the buckle of her girdle, she said, "We are waiting upon your honours' kind grace, and feel how much we owe to you for favouring our poor abode." And then she gently rose up again, smiling, oh, so sweetly, on the

man she loved, and the puffings and swellings went out of her muslin.

I think there is nothing in the world so pretty as the conscious little tricks of love played off by a girl towards the man she loves, when she has made up her mind boldly that all the world may know that she has given herself away to him.

I am not sure that Crosbie liked it all as much as he should have done. The bold assurance of her love when they two were alone together he did like. What man does not like such assurances on such occasions? But perhaps he would have been better pleased had Lily shown more reticence,—been more secret, as it were, as to her feelings, when others were around them. It was not that he accused her in his thoughts of any want of delicacy. He read her character too well;—was, if not quite aright in his reading of it, at least too nearly so to admit of his making against her any such accusation as that. It was the calf-like feeling that was disagreeable to him. He did not like to be presented, even to the world of Allington, as a victim caught for the sacrifice, and bound with ribbon for the altar. And then there lurked behind it all a feeling that it might be safer that the thing should not be so openly manifested before all the world. Of course, everybody knew that he was engaged to Lily Dale; nor had he, as he said to himself, perhaps too frequently, the slightest idea of breaking from that engagement. But then the marriage might possibly be delayed. He had not discussed that matter yet with Lily, having, indeed, at the first moment of his gratified love, created some little difficulty for himself by pressing for an early day. "I will refuse you nothing," she had said to him; "but do not make it too soon." He saw, therefore, before him some little embarrassment, and was inclined to wish that Lily would abstain from that manner which seemed to declare to all the world that she was about to be married immediately. "I must speak to her to-morrow," he said to himself, as he accepted her salute with a mock gravity equal to her own.

Poor Lily! How little she understood as yet what was passing through his mind. Had she known his wish she would have wrapped up her love carefully in a napkin, so that no one should have seen it,—no one but he, when he might choose to have the treasure uncovered for his sight. And it was all for his sake that she had been thus open in her ways. She had seen girls who were half ashamed of their love; but she would never be ashamed of hers or of him. She had given herself to him; and now all the world might know it, if all the world cared for such knowledge. Why should she be ashamed of that which, to her thinking, was so great an honour to her? She had heard of girls who would not speak of their love, arguing to themselves cannily that there may be many a slip between the cup and the lip. There could be no need of any such caution with her. There could surely be no such slip! Should there be such a fall,—should any such fate, either by falseness or misfortune, come upon her,—no such caution could be of service to save her. The cup would have been so shattered in its fall that no further piecing of its parts would be in any way possible. So much as this she did not exactly say to herself; but she felt it all, and went bravely forward,—bold in her love, and careful to hide it from none who chanced to see it.

They had gone through the ceremony with the cake and teacups, and had decided that, at any rate, the first dance or two should be held upon the lawn when the last of the guests arrived.

"Oh, Adolphus, I am so glad he has come," said Lily. "Do try to like him." Of Dr. Crofts, who was the new comer, she had sometimes spoken to her lover, but she had never coupled her sister's name with that of the doctor, even in speaking to him. Nevertheless, Crosbie had in some way conceived the idea that this Crofts either had been, or was, or was to be, in love with Bell; and as he was prepared to advocate his friend Dale's claims in that quarter, he was not particularly anxious to welcome the doctor as a thoroughly

intimate friend of the family. He knew nothing as yet of Dale's offer, or of Bell's refusal, but he was prepared for war, if war should be necessary. Of the squire, at the present moment, he was not very fond; but if his destiny intended to give him a wife out of this family, he should prefer the owner of Allington and nephew of Lord De Guest as a brother-in-law to a village doctor,—as he took upon himself, in his pride, to call Dr. Crofts.

"It is very unfortunate," said he, "but I never do like Paragons."

"But you must like this Paragon. Not that he is a Paragon at all, for he smokes and hunts, and does all manner of wicked things." And then she went forward to welcome her friend.

Dr. Crofts was a slight, spare man, about five feet nine in height, with very bright dark eyes, a broad forehead, with dark hair that almost curled, but which did not come so forward over his brow as it should have done for purposes of beauty,—with a thin well-cut nose, and a mouth that would have been perfect had the lips been a little fuller. The lower part of his face, when seen alone, had in it somewhat of sternness, which, however, was redeemed by the brightness of his eyes. And yet an artist would have declared that the lower features of his face were by far the more handsome.

Lily went across to him and greeted him heartily, declaring how glad she was to have him there. "And I must introduce you to Mr. Crosbie," she said, as though she was determined to carry her point. The two men shook hands with each other, coldly, without saying a word, as young men are apt to do when they are brought together in that way. Then they separated at once, somewhat to the disappointment of Lily. Crosbie stood off by himself, both his eyes turned up towards the ceiling, and looking as though he meant to give himself airs; while Crofts got himself quickly up to the fireplace, making civil little speeches to Mrs. Dale, Mrs. Boyce, and Mrs. Hearn. And then at last he made his way round to Bell.

"I am so glad," he said, "to congratulate you on your sister's engagement."

"Yes," said Bell; "we knew that you would be glad to hear of her happiness."

"Indeed, I am glad; and thoroughly hope that she may be happy. You all like him, do you not?"

"We like him very much."

"And I am told that he is well off. He is a very fortunate man,—very fortunate,—very fortunate."

"Of course we think so," said Bell. "Not, however, because he is rich."

"No; not because he is rich. But because, being worthy of such happiness, his circumstances should enable him to marry, and to enjoy it."

"Yes, exactly," said Bell. "That is just it." Then she sat down, and in sitting down put an end to the conversation. "That is just it," she had said. But as soon as the words were spoken she declared to herself that it was not so, and that Crofts was wrong. "We love him," she said to herself, "not because he is rich enough to marry without anxious thought, but because he dares to marry although he is not rich." And then she told herself that she was angry with the doctor.

After that Dr. Crofts got off towards the door, and stood there by himself, leaning against the wall, with the thumbs of both his hands stuck into the armholes of his waistcoat. People said that he was a shy man. I suppose he was shy, and yet he was a man that was by no means afraid of doing anything that he had to do. He could speak before a multitude without being abashed, whether it was a multitude of men or of women. He could be very fixed too in his own opinion, and eager, if not violent, in the prosecution of his purpose. But he could not stand and say little words, when he had in truth nothing to say. He could not keep his ground when he felt that he was not using the ground upon which he stood. He had not learned the art of assuming himself to be of importance in whatever place he might find himself. It was this art

which Crosbie had learned, and by this art that he had flourished. So Crofts retired and leaned against the wall near the door; and Crosbie came forward and shone like an Apollo among all the guests. "How is it that he does it?" said John Eames to himself, envying the perfect happiness of the London man of fashion.

At last Lily got the dancers out upon the lawn, and then they managed to go through one quadrille. But it was found that it did not answer. The music of the single fiddle which Crosbie had hired from Guestwick was not sufficient for the purpose; and then the grass, though it was perfect for purposes of croquet, was not pleasant to the feet for dancing.

"This is very nice," said Bernard to his cousin. "I don't know anything that could be nicer; but perhaps——"

"I know what you mean," said Lily. "But I shall stay here. There's no touch of romance about any of you. Look at the moon there at the back of the steeple. I don't mean to go in all night." Then she walked off by one of the paths, and her lover went after her.

"Don't you like the moon?" she said, as she took his arm, to which she was now so accustomed that she hardly thought of it as she took it.

"Like the moon?—well; I fancy I like the sun better. I don't quite believe in moonlight. I think it does best to talk about when one wants to be sentimental."

"Ah; that is just what I fear. That is what I say to Bell when I tell her that her romance will fade as the roses do. And then I shall have to learn that prose is more serviceable than poetry, and that the mind is better than the heart, and—and that money is better than love. It's all coming, I know; and yet I do like the moonlight."

"And the poetry,—and the love?"

"Yes. The poetry much, and the love more. To be loved by you is sweeter even than any of my dreams,—is better than all the poetry I have read."

"Dearest Lily," and his unchecked arm stole round her waist.

"It is the meaning of the moonlight, and the essence of the poetry," continued the impassioned girl. "I did not know then why I liked such things, but now I know. It was because I longed to be loved."

"And to love."

"Oh, yes. I would be nothing without that. But that, you know, is your delight,—or should be. The other is mine. And yet it is a delight to love you; to know that I may love you."

"You mean that this is the realization of your romance."

"Yes; but it must not be the end of it, Adolphus. You must like the soft twilight, and the long evenings when we shall be alone; and you must read to me the books I love, and you must not teach me to think that the world is hard, and dry, and cruel,—not yet. I tell Bell so very often; but you must not say so to me."

"It shall not be dry and cruel, if I can prevent it."

"You understand what I mean, dearest. I will not think it dry and cruel, even though sorrow should come upon us, if you—— I think you know what I mean."

"If I am good to you."

"I am not afraid of that;—I am not the least afraid of that. You do not think that I could ever distrust you? But you must not be ashamed to look at the moonlight, and to read poetry, and to——"

"To talk nonsense, you mean."

But as he said it he pressed her closer to his side, and his tone was pleasant to her.

"I suppose I'm talking nonsense now?" she said, pouting. "You liked me better when I was talking about the pigs; didn't you?"

"No; I like you best now."

"And why didn't you like me then? Did I say anything to offend you?"

"I like you best now, because——"

They were standing in the narrow pathway of the gate leading from the bridge into the gardens of the Great House, and the shadow of the thick-spreading

laurels was around them. But the moonlight still pierced brightly through the little avenue, and she, as she looked up to him, could see the form of his face and the loving softness of his eye.

"Because——" said he; and then he stooped over her and pressed her closely, while she put up her lips to his, standing on tip-toe that she might reach to his face.

"Oh, my love!" she said. "My love! my love!"

As Crosbie walked back to the Great House that night, he made a firm resolution that no consideration of worldly welfare should ever induce him to break his engagement with Lily Dale. He went somewhat further also, and determined that he would not put off the marriage for more than six or eight months, or, at the most, ten, if he could possibly get his affairs arranged in that time. To be sure, he must give up everything,—all the aspirations and ambitions of his life; but then, as he declared to himself somewhat mournfully, he was prepared to do that. Such were his resolutions, and, as he thought of them in bed, he came to the conclusion that few men were less selfish than he was.

"But what will they say to us for staying away?" said Lily, recovering herself. "And I ought to be making the people dance, you know. Come along, and do make yourself nice. Do waltz with Mary Eames; pray, do. If you don't, I won't speak to you all night!"

Acting under which threat, Crosbie did, on his return, solicit the honour of that young lady's hand, thereby elating her into a seventh heaven of happiness. What could the world afford better than a waltz with such a partner as Adolphus Crosbie? And poor Mary Eames could waltz well; though she could not talk much as she danced, and would pant a good deal when she stopped. She put too much of her energy into the motion, and was too anxious to do the mechanical part in a manner that should be satisfactory to her partner. "Oh! thank you; it's very nice. I shall be able to

go on—again directly." Her conversation with Crosbie did not get much beyond that, and yet she felt that she had never done better than on this occasion.

Though there were, at most, not above five couples of dancers, and though they who did not dance, such as the squire and Mr. Boyce, and a curate from a neighbouring parish, had, in fact, nothing to amuse them, the affair was kept on very merrily for a considerable number of hours. Exactly at twelve o'clock there was a little supper, which, no doubt, served to relieve Mrs. Hearn's ennui, and at which Mrs. Boyce also seemed to enjoy herself. As to the Mrs. Boyces on such occasions, I profess that I feel no pity. They are generally happy in their children's happiness, or, if not, they ought to be. At any rate, they are simply performing a manifest duty, which duty, in their time, was performed on their behalf. But on what account do the Mrs. Hearns betake themselves to such gatherings? Why did that ancient lady sit there hour after hour yawning, longing for her bed, looking every ten minutes at her watch, while her old bones were stiff and sore, and her old ears pained with the noise? It could hardly have been simply for the sake of the supper. After the supper, however, her maid took her across to her cottage, and Mrs. Boyce also then stole away home, and the squire went off with some little parade, suggesting to the young men that they should make no noise in the house as they returned. But the poor curate remained, talking a dull word every now and then to Mrs. Dale, and looking on with tantalized eyes at the joys which the world had prepared for others than him. I must say that I think that public opinion and the bishops together are too hard upon curates in this particular.

In the latter part of the night's delight, when time and practice had made them all happy together, John Eames stood up for the first time to dance with Lily. She had done all she could, short of asking him, to induce him to do her this favour; for she felt that it would be a favour. How great had been the desire on

his part to ask her, and, at the same time, how great the repugnance, Lily, perhaps, did not quite understand. And yet she understood much of it. She knew that he was not angry with her. She knew that he was suffering from the injured pride of futile love, almost as much as from the futile love itself. She wished to put him at his ease in this; but she did not quite give him credit for the full sincerity, and the upright, uncontrolled heartiness of his feelings.

At length he did come up to her, and though, in truth, she was engaged, she at once accepted his offer. Then she tripped across the room. "Adolphus," she said, "I can't dance with you, though I said I would. John Eames has asked me, and I haven't stood up with him before. You understand, and you'll be a good boy, won't you?"

Crosbie, not being in the least jealous, was a good boy, and sat himself down to rest, hidden behind a door.

For the first few minutes the conversation between Eames and Lily was of a very matter-of-fact kind. She repeated her wish that she might see him in London, and he said that of course he should come and call. Then there was silence for a little while, and they went through their figure dancing.

"I don't at all know yet when we are to be married," said Lily, as soon as they were again standing together.

"No; I dare say not," said Eames.

"But not this year, I suppose. Indeed, I should say, of course not."

"In the spring, perhaps," suggested Eames. He had an unconscious desire that it might be postponed to some Greek kalends, and yet he did not wish to injure Lily.

"The reason I mention it is this, that we should be so very glad if you could be here. We all love you so much, and I should so like to have you here on that day."

Why is it that girls so constantly do this,—so fre-

quently ask men who have loved them to be present at their marriages with other men? There is no triumph in it. It is done in sheer kindness and affection. They intend to offer something which shall soften and not aggravate the sorrow that they have caused. "You can't marry me yourself," the lady seems to say. "But the next greatest blessing which I can offer you shall be yours,—you shall see me married to somebody else." I fully appreciate the intention, but in honest truth, I doubt the eligibility of the proffered entertainment.

On the present occasion John Eames seemed to be of this opinion, for he did not at once accept the invitation.

"Will you not oblige me so far as that?" said she softly.

"I would do anything to oblige you," said he gruffly; "almost anything."

"But not that?"

"No; not that. I could not do that." Then he went off upon his figure, and when they were next both standing together, they remained silent till their turn for dancing had again come. Why was it, that after that night Lily thought more of John Eames than ever she had thought before;—felt for him, I mean, a higher respect, as for a man who had a will of his own?

And in that quadrille Crofts and Bell had been dancing together, and they also had been talking of Lily's marriage. "A man may undergo what he likes for himself," he had said, "but he has no right to make a woman undergo poverty."

"Perhaps not," said Bell.

"That which is no suffering for a man,—which no man should think of for himself,—will make a hell on earth for a woman."

"I suppose it would!" said Bell, answering him without a sign of feeling in her face or voice. But she took in every word that he spoke, and disputed their truth inwardly with all the strength of her heart and

mind, and with the very vehemence of her soul. "As if a woman cannot bear more than a man!" she said to herself, as she walked the length of the room alone, when she had got herself free from the doctor's arm.

After that they all went to bed.

CHAPTER X

MRS. LUPEX AND AMELIA ROPER

I SHOULD simply mislead a confiding reader if I were to tell him that Mrs. Lupex was an amiable woman. Perhaps the fact that she was not amiable is the one great fault that should be laid to her charge; but that fault had spread itself so widely, and had cropped forth in so many different places of her life, like a strong rank plant that will show itself all over a garden, that it may almost be said that it made her odious in every branch of life, and detestable alike to those who knew her little and to those who knew her much. If a searcher could have got at the inside spirit of the woman, that searcher would have found that she wished to go right,—that she did make, or at any rate promise to herself that she would make, certain struggles to attain decency and propriety. But it was so natural to her to torment those whose misfortune brought them near to her, and especially that wretched man who in an evil day had taken her to his bosom as his wife, that decency fled from her, and propriety would not live in her quarters.

Mrs. Lupex was, as I have already described her, a woman not without some feminine attraction in the eyes of those who like morning negligence and evening finery, and do not object to a long nose somewhat on one side. She was clever in her way, and could say smart things. She could flatter also, though her very flattery had always in it something that was disagreeable. And she must have had some power of will, as otherwise her husband would have escaped from her

before the days of which I am writing. Otherwise, also, she could hardly have obtained her footing and kept it in Mrs. Roper's drawing-room. For though the hundred pounds a year, either paid, or promised to be paid, was matter with Mrs. Roper of vast consideration, nevertheless the first three months of Mrs. Lupex's sojourn in Burton Crescent were not over before the landlady of that house was most anxiously desirous of getting herself quit of her married boarders.

I shall perhaps best describe a little incident that had occurred in Burton Crescent during the absence of our friend Eames, and the manner in which things were going on in that locality, by giving at length two letters which Johnny received by post at Guestwick on the morning after Mrs. Dale's party. One was from his friend Cradell, and the other from the devoted Amelia. In this instance I will give that from the gentleman first, presuming that I shall best consult my reader's wishes by keeping the greater delicacy till the last.

Income-tax Office, September, 186—.

My dear Johnny,—We have had a terrible affair in the Crescent; and I really hardly know how to tell you; and yet I must do it, for I want your advice. You know the sort of standing that I was on with Mrs. Lupex, and perhaps you remember what we were saying on the platform at the station. I have, no doubt, been fond of her society, as I might be of that of any other friend. I knew, of course, that she was a fine woman; and if her husband chose to be jealous, I couldn't help that. But I never intended anything wrong; and, if it was necessary, couldn't I call you as a witness to prove it? I never spoke a word to her out of Mrs. Roper's drawing-room; and Miss Spruce, or Mrs. Roper, or somebody has always been there. You know he drinks horribly sometimes, but I do not think he ever gets downright drunk. Well, he came home last night about nine o'clock after one of these bouts. From what Jemima says [Jemima was Mrs. Roper's parlour-maid], I believe he had been at it

down at the theatre for three days. We hadn't seen him since Tuesday. He went straight into the parlour and sent up Jemima to me, to say that he wanted to see me. Mrs. Lupex was in the room and heard the girl summon me, and, jumping up, she declared that if there was going to be blood shed she would leave the house. There was nobody else in the room but Miss Spruce, and she didn't say a word, but took her candle and went upstairs. You must own it looked very uncomfortable. What was I to do with a drunken man down in the parlour? However, she seemed to think I ought to go. "If he comes up here," said she, "I shall be the victim. You little know of what that man is capable when his wrath has been inflamed by wine." Now, I think you are aware that I am not likely to be very much afraid of any man; but why was I to be got into a row in such a way as this? I hadn't done anything. And then, if there was to be a quarrel, and anything was to come of it, as she seemed to expect,—like bloodshed, I mean, or a fight, or if he were to knock me on the head with the poker, where should I be at my office? A man in a public office, as you and I are, can't quarrel like anybody else. It was this that I felt so much at the moment. "Go down to him," said she, "unless you wish to see me murdered at your feet." Fisher says, that if what I say is true, they must have arranged it all between them. I don't think that; for I do believe that she is really fond of me. And then everybody knows that they never do agree about anything. But she certainly did implore me to go down to him. Well, I went down; and, as I got to the bottom of the stairs, where I found Jemima, I heard him walking up and down the parlour. "Take care of yourself, Mr. Cradell," said the girl; and I could see by her face that she was in a terrible fright.

At that moment I happened to see my hat on the hall table, and it occurred to me that I ought to put myself into the hands of a friend. Of course, I was not afraid of that man in the dining-room; but should

I have been justified in engaging in a struggle, perhaps for dear life, in Mrs. Roper's house? I was bound to think of her interests. So I took up my hat, and deliberately walked out of the front door. "Tell him," said I to Jemima, "that I'm not at home." And so I went away direct to Fisher's, meaning to send him back to Lupex as my friend; but Fisher was at his chess-club.

As I thought there was no time to be lost on such an occasion as this, I went down to the club and called him out. You know what a cool fellow Fisher is. I don't suppose anything would ever excite him. When I told him the story, he said that he would sleep upon it; and I had to walk up and down before the club while he finished his game. Fisher seemed to think that I might go back to Burton Crescent; but, of course, I knew that would be out of the question. So it ended in my going home and sleeping on his sofa, and sending for some of my things in the morning. I wanted him to get up and see Lupex before going to the office this morning. But he seemed to think it would be better to put it off, and so he will call upon him at the theatre immediately after office hours.

I want you to write to me at once saying what you know about the matter. I ask you, as I don't want to lug in any of the other people at Roper's. It is very uncomfortable, as I can't exactly leave her at once because of last quarter's money, otherwise I should cut and run; for the house is not the sort of place either for you or me. You may take my word for that, Master Johnny. And I could tell you something, too, about A. R., only I don't want to make mischief. But do you write immediately. And now I think of it, you had better write to Fisher, so that he can show your letter to Lupex,—just saying, that to the best of your belief there had never been anything between her and me but mere friendship; and that, of course, you, as my friend, must have known everything. Whether I shall go back to Roper's to-night will depend on what Fisher says after the interview.

Good-by, old fellow! I hope you are enjoying yourself, and that L. D. is quite well.—Your sincere friend,

JOSEPH CRADELL.

John Eames read this letter over twice before he opened that from Amelia. He had never yet received a letter from Miss Roper; and felt very little of that ardour for its perusal which young men generally experience on the receipt of a first letter from a young lady. The memory of Amelia was at the present moment distasteful to him; and he would have thrown the letter unopened into the fire, had he not felt it might be dangerous to do so. As regarded his friend Cradell, he could not but feel ashamed of him,—ashamed of him, not for running away from Mr. Lupex, but for excusing his escape on false pretences.

And then, at last, he opened the letter from Amelia. "Dearest John," it began; and as he read the words, he crumpled the paper up between his fingers. It was written in a fair female hand, with sharp points instead of curves to the letters, but still very legible, and looking as though there were a decided purport in every word of it.

DEAREST JOHN,—It feels so strange to me to write to you in such language as this. And yet you are dearest, and have I not a right to call you so? And are you not my own, and am not I yours? [Again he crunched the paper up in his hand, and, as he did so, he muttered words which I need not repeat at length. But still he went on with his letter.] I know that we understand each other perfectly, and when that is the case, heart should be allowed to speak openly to heart. Those are my feelings, and I believe that you will find them reciprocal in your own bosom. Is it not sweet to be loved? I find it so. And, dearest John, let me assure you, with open candour, that there is no room for jealousy in this breast with regard to you. I have too much confidence for that, I can assure you, both in your honour and in my own—I would say charms, only you would call me vain. You must not suppose

that I meant what I said about L. D. Of course, you will be glad to see the friends of your childhood; and it would be far from your Amelia's heart to begrudge you such delightful pleasure. Your friends will, I hope, some day be my friends. [Another crunch.] And if there be any one among them, any real L. D. whom you have specially liked, I will receive her to my heart, specially also. [This assurance on the part of his Amelia was too much for him, and he threw the letter from him, thinking whence he might get relief—whether from suicide or from the colonies; but presently he took it up again, and drained the bitter cup to the bottom.] And if I seemed petulant to you before you went away, you must forgive your own Amelia. I had nothing before me but misery for the month of your absence. There is no one here congenial to my feelings,—of course not. And you would not wish me to be happy in your absence,—would you? I can assure you, let your wishes be what they may, I never can be happy again unless you are with me. Write to me one little line, and tell me that you are grateful to me for my devotion.

And now, I must tell you that we have had a sad affair in the house; and I do not think that your friend Mr. Cradell has behaved at all well. You remember how he has been always going on with Mrs. Lupex. Mother was quite unhappy about it, though she didn't like to say anything. Of course, when a lady's name is concerned, it is particular. But Lupex has become dreadful jealous during the last week; and we all knew that something was coming. She is an artful woman, but I don't think she meant anything bad—only to drive her husband to desperation. He came here yesterday in one of his tantrums, and wanted to see Cradell; but he got frightened, and took his hat and went off. Now, that wasn't quite right. If he was innocent, why didn't he stand his ground and explain the mistake? As mother says, it gives the house such a name. Lupex swore last night that he'd be off to the Income-tax Office this morning, and have Cradell out

before all the commissioners, and clerks, and everybody. If he does that, it will get into the papers, and all London will be full of it. She would like it, I know; for all she cares for is to be talked about; but only think what it will be for mother's house. I wish you were here; for your high prudence and courage would set everything right at once,—at least, I think so.

I shall count the minutes till I get an answer to this, and shall envy the postman who will have your letter before it will reach me. Do write at once. If I do not hear by Monday morning I shall think that something is the matter. Even though you are among your dear old friends, surely you can find a moment to write to your own Amelia.

Mother is very unhappy about this affair of the Lupexes. She says that if you were here to advise her she should not mind it so much. It is very hard upon her, for she does strive to make the house respectable and comfortable for everybody. I would send my duty and love to your dear mamma, if I only knew her, as I hope I shall do one day, and to your sister, and to L. D. also, if you like to tell her how we are situated together. So, now, no more from your

Always affectionate sweetheart,

AMELIA ROPER.

Poor Eames did not feel the least gratified by any part of this fond letter; but the last paragraph of it was the worst. Was it to be endured by him that this woman should send her love to his mother and to his sister, and even to Lily Dale? He felt that there was a pollution in the very mention of Lily's name by such an one as Amelia Roper. And yet Amelia Roper was, as she had assured him,—his own. Much as he disliked her at the present moment, he did believe that he was—her own. He did feel that she had obtained a certain property in him, and that his destiny in life would tie him to her. He had said very few words of love to her at any time—very few, at least, that were themselves of any moment; but among those few there

had undoubtedly been one or two in which he had told her that he loved her. And he had written to her that fatal note! Upon the whole, would it not be as well for him to go out to the great reservoir behind Guestwick, by which the Hamersham Canal was fed with its waters, and put an end to his miserable existence?

On that same day he did write a letter to Fisher, and he wrote also to Cradell. As to those letters he felt no difficulty. To Fisher he declared his belief that Cradell was innocent as he was himself as regarded Mrs. Lupex. "I don't think he is the sort of man to make up to a married woman," he said, somewhat to Cradell's displeasure, when the letter reached the Income-tax Office; for that gentleman was not averse to the reputation for success in love which the little adventure was, as he thought, calculated to give him among his brother clerks. At the first bursting of the shell, when that desperately jealous man was raging in the parlour, incensed by the fumes both of wine and love, Cradell had felt that the affair was disagreeably painful. But on the morning of the third day—for he had passed two nights on his friend Fisher's sofa—he had begun to be somewhat proud of it, and did not dislike to hear Mrs. Lupex's name in the mouths of the other clerks. When, therefore, Fisher read to him the letter from Guestwick, he hardly was pleased with his friend's tone. "Ha, ha, ha," said he, laughing. "That's just what I wanted him to say. Make up to a married woman, indeed. No; I'm the last man in London to do that sort of thing."

"Upon my word, Caudle, I think you are," said Fisher; "the very last man."

And then poor Cradell was not happy. On that afternoon he boldly went to Burton Crescent, and ate his dinner there. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Lupex were to be seen, nor were their names mentioned to him by Mrs. Roper. In the course of the evening he did pluck up courage to ask Miss Spruce where they were; but that ancient lady merely shook her head solemnly, and

declared that she knew nothing about such goings on—no, not she.

But what was John Eames to do as to that letter from Amelia Roper? He felt that any answer to it would be very dangerous, and yet that he could not safely leave it unanswered. He walked off by himself across Guestwick Common, and through the woods of Guestwick Manor, up by the big avenue of elms in Lord De Guest's park, trying to resolve how he might rescue himself from this scrape. Here, over the same ground, he had wandered scores of times in his earlier years, when he knew nothing beyond the innocency of his country home, thinking of Lily Dale, and swearing to himself that she should be his wife. Here he had strung together his rhymes, and fed his ambition with high hopes, building gorgeous castles in the air, in all of which Lilian reigned as a queen; and though in those days he had known himself to be awkward, poor, uncared for by any in the world except his mother and his sister, yet he had been happy in his hopes—happy in his hopes, even though he had never taught himself really to believe that they would be realized. But now there was nothing in his hopes or thoughts to make him happy. Everything was black, and wretched, and ruinous. What would it matter, after all, even if he should marry Amelia Roper, seeing that Lily was to be given to another? But then the idea of Amelia as he had seen her that night through the chink in the door came upon his memory, and he confessed to himself that life with such a wife as that would be a living death.

At one moment he thought that he would tell his mother everything, and leave her to write an answer to Amelia's letter. Should the worst come to the worst, the Ropers could not absolutely destroy him. That they could bring an action against him, and have him locked up for a term of years, and dismissed from his office, and exposed in all the newspapers, he seemed to know. That might all, however, be endured, if only the gauntlet could be thrown down for him by some one else. The one thing which he felt that he could

not do was, to write to a girl whom he had professed to love, and tell her that he did not love her. He knew that he could not himself form such words upon the paper; nor, as he was well aware, could he himself find the courage to tell her to her face that he had changed his mind. He knew that he must become the victim of his Amelia, unless he could find some friendly knight to do battle in his favour; and then again he thought of his mother.

But when he returned home he was as far as ever from any resolve to tell her how he was situated. I may say that his walk had done him no good, and that he had not made up his mind to anything. He had been building those pernicious castles in the air during more than half the time; not castles in the building of which he could make himself happy, as he had done in the old days, but black castles, with cruel dungeons, into which hardly a ray of light could find its way. In all these edifices his imagination pictured to him Lily as the wife of Mr. Crosbie. He accepted that as a fact, and then went to work in his misery, making her as wretched as himself, through the misconduct and harshness of her husband. He tried to think, and to resolve what he would do; but there is no task so hard as that of thinking, when the mind has an objection to the matter brought before it. The mind, under such circumstances, is like a horse that is brought to the water, but refuses to drink. So Johnny returned to his home, still doubting whether or no he would answer Amelia's letter. And if he did not answer it, how would he conduct himself on his return to Burton Crescent?

I need hardly say that Miss Roper, in writing her letter, had been aware of all this, and that Johnny's position had been carefully prepared for him by—his affectionate sweetheart.

CHAPTER XI

SOCIAL LIFE

Mr. and Mrs. Lupex had eaten a sweetbread together in much connubial bliss on that day which had seen Cradell returning to Mrs. Roper's hospitable board. They had together eaten a sweetbread, with some other delicacies of the season, in the neighbourhood of the theatre, and had washed down all unkindness with bitter beer and brandy-and-water. But of this reconciliation Cradell had not heard; and when he saw them come together into the drawing-room, a few minutes after the question he had addressed to Miss Spruce, he was certainly surprised.

Lupex was not an ill-natured man, nor one naturally savage by disposition. He was a man fond of sweetbread and little dinners, and one to whom hot brandy-and-water was too dear. Had the wife of his bosom been a good helpmate to him, he might have gone through the world, if not respectably, at any rate without open disgrace. But she was a woman who left a man no solace except that to be found in brandy-and-water. For eight years they had been man and wife; and sometimes—I grieve to say it—he had been driven almost to hope that she would commit a married woman's last sin, and leave him. In his misery, any mode of escape would have been welcome to him. Had his energy been sufficient he would have taken his scene-painting capabilities off to Australia,—or to the farthest shifting of scenes known on the world's stage. But he was an easy, listless, self-indulgent man; and at any moment, let his misery be as keen as might be, a little dinner, a few soft words, and a glass of brandy-and-water would bring him round. The second glass would make him the fondest husband living; but the third would restore to him the memory of all his wrongs, and give him courage against his wife or all

the world,—even to the detriment of the furniture around him, should a stray poker chance to meet his hand. All these peculiarities of his character were not, however, known to Cradell; and when our friend saw him enter the drawing-room with his wife on his arm, he was astonished.

"Mr. Cradell, your hand," said Lupex, who had advanced as far as the second glass of brandy-and-water, but had not been allowed to go beyond it. "There has been a misunderstanding between us; let it be forgotten."

"Mr. Cradell, if I know him," said the lady, "is too much the gentleman to bear any anger when a gentleman has offered him his hand."

"Oh, I'm sure," said Cradell, "I'm quite—indeed, I'm delighted to find there's nothing wrong after all." And then he shook hands with both of them; whereupon Miss Spruce got up, curtseyed low, and also shook hands with the husband and wife.

"You're not a married man, Mr. Cradell," said Lupex, "and, therefore, you cannot understand the workings of a husband's heart. There have been moments when my regard for that woman has been too much for me."

"Now, Lupex, don't," said she, playfully tapping him with an old parasol which she still held.

"And I do not hesitate to say that my regard for her was too much for me on that night when I sent for you to the dining-room."

"I'm glad it's all put right now," said Cradell.

"Very glad, indeed," said Miss Spruce.

"And, therefore, we need not say any more about it," said Mrs. Lupex.

"One word," said Lupex, waving his hand. "Mr. Cradell, I greatly rejoice that you did not obey my summons on that night. Had you done so,—I confess it now,—had you done so, blood would have been the consequence. I was mistaken. I acknowledge my mistake;—but blood would have been the consequence."

"Dear, dear, dear," said Miss Spruce.

"Miss Spruce," continued Lupex, "there are moments when the heart becomes too strong for a man."

"I dare say," said Miss Spruce.

"Now, Lupex, that will do," said his wife.

"Yes; that will do. But I think it right to tell Mr. Cradell that I am glad he did not come to me. Your friend, Mr. Cradell, did me the honour of calling on me at the theatre yesterday, at half-past four; but I was in the slings then, and could not very well come down to him. I shall be happy to see you both any day at five, and to bury all unkindness with a chop and glass at the Pot and Poker, in Bow-street."

"I'm sure you're very kind," said Cradell.

"And Mrs. Lupex will join us. There's a delightful little snuggery upstairs at the Pot and Poker; and if Miss Spruce will condescend to——"

"Oh, I'm an old woman, sir."

"No—no—no," said Lupex, "I deny that. Come, Cradell, what do you say?—just a snug little dinner for four, you know."

It was, no doubt, pleasant to see Mr. Lupex in his present mood,—much pleasanter than in that other mood of which blood would have been the consequence; but pleasant as he now was, it was, nevertheless, apparent that he was not quite sober. Cradell, therefore, did not settle the day for the little dinner; but merely remarked that he should be very happy at some future day.

"And now, Lupex, suppose you get off to bed," said his wife. "You had a very trying day, you know."

"And you, ducky?"

"I shall come presently. Now don't be making a fool of yourself, but get yourself off. Come—" and she stood close up against the open door, waiting for him to pass.

"I rather think I shall remain where I am, and have a glass of something hot," said he.

"Lupex, do you want to aggravate me again?" said the lady, and she looked at him with a glance of her

eye which he thoroughly understood. He was not in a humour for fighting, nor was he at present desirous of blood; so he resolved to go. But as he went he prepared himself for new battles. "I shall do something desperate, I am sure; I know I shall," he said, as he pulled off his boots.

"Oh, Mr. Cradell," said Mrs. Lupex as soon as she had closed the door behind her retreating husband, "how am I ever to look you in the face again after the events of these last memorable days?" And then she seated herself on the sofa, and hid her face in a cambric handkerchief.

"As for that," said Cradell, "what does it signify,—among friends like us, you know?"

"But that it should be known at your office,—as of course it is, because of the gentleman that went down to him at the theatre!—I don't think I shall ever survive it."

"You see I was obliged to send somebody, Mrs. Lupex."

"I'm not finding fault, Mr. Cradell. I know very well that in my melancholy position I have no right to find fault, and I don't pretend to understand gentlemen's feelings towards each other. But to have had my name mentioned up with yours in that way is—— Oh! Mr. Cradell, I don't know how I'm ever to look you in the face again." And again she buried hers in her pocket-handkerchief.

"Handsome is as handsome does," said Miss Spruce; and there was that in her tone of voice which seemed to convey much hidden meaning.

"Exactly so, Miss Spruce," said Mrs. Lupex; "and that's my only comfort at the present moment. Mr. Cradell is a gentleman who would scorn to take advantage—I'm quite sure of that." And then she did contrive to look at him over the edge of the hand which held the handkerchief.

"That I wouldn't, I'm sure," said Cradell. "That is to say——" And then he paused. He did not wish to get into a scrape about Mrs. Lupex. He was by no

means anxious to encounter her husband in one of his fits of jealousy. But he did like the idea of being talked of as the admirer of a married woman, and he did like the brightness of the lady's eyes. When the unfortunate moth in his semi-blindness whisks himself and his wings within the flame of the candle, and finds himself mutilated and tortured, he even then will not take the lesson, but returns again and again till he is destroyed. Such a moth was poor Cradell. There was no warmth to be got by him from that flame. There was no beauty in the light,—not even the false brilliance of unhallowed love. Injury might come to him,—a pernicious clipping of the wings, which might destroy all power of future flight; injury, and not improbably destruction, if he should persevere. But one may say that no single hour of happiness could accrue to him from his intimacy with Mrs. Lupex. He felt for her no love. He was afraid of her, and, in many respects, disliked her. But to him, in his moth-like weakness, ignorance, and blindness, it seemed to be a great thing that he should be allowed to fly near the candle. Oh! my friends, if you will but think of it, how many of you have been moths, and are now going about ungracefully with wings more or less burnt off, and with bodies sadly scorched!

But before Mr. Cradell could make up his mind whether or no he would take advantage of the present opportunity for another dip into the flame of the candle,—in regard to which proceeding, however, he could not but feel that the presence of Miss Spruce was objectionable,—the door of the room was opened, and Amelia Roper joined the party.

"Oh, indeed; Mrs. Lupex," she said. "And Mr. Cradell!"

"And Miss Spruce, my dear," said Mrs. Lupex, pointing to the ancient lady.

"I'm only an old woman," said Miss Spruce.

"Oh, yes; I see Miss Spruce," said Amelia. "I was not hinting at anything, I can assure you."

"I should think not, my dear," said Mrs. Lupex.

"Only I didn't know that you two were quite—— That is, when last I heard about it, I fancied—— But if the quarrel's made up, there's nobody more rejoiced than I am."

"The quarrel is made up," said Cradell.

"If Mr. Lupex is satisfied, I'm sure I am," said Amelia.

"Mr. Lupex is satisfied," said Mrs. Lupex; "and let me tell you, my dear, seeing that you are expecting to get married yourself——"

"Mrs. Lupex, I'm not expecting to get married,—not particularly, by any means."

"Oh, I thought you were. And let me tell you, that when you've got a husband of your own, you won't find it so easy to keep everything straight. That's the worst of these lodgings, if there is any little thing, everybody knows it. Don't they, Miss Spruce?"

"Lodgings is so much more comfortable than housekeeping," said Miss Spruce, who lived rather in fear of her relatives, the Ropers.

"Everybody knows it; does he?" said Amelia. "Why, if a gentleman will come home at night tipsy and threaten to murder another gentleman in the same house; and if a lady——" And then Amelia paused, for she knew that the line-of-battle ship which she was preparing to encounter had within her much power of fighting.

"Well, miss," said Mrs. Lupex, getting on her feet, "and what of the lady?"

Now we may say that the battle had begun, and that the two ships were pledged by the general laws of courage and naval warfare to maintain the contest till one of them should be absolutely disabled, if not blown up or sunk. And at this moment it might be difficult for a bystander to say with which of the combatants rested the better chance of permanent success. Mrs. Lupex had doubtless on her side more matured power, a habit of fighting which had given her infinite skill, a courage which deadened her to the feeling of all wounds while the heat of the battle should last.

and a recklessness which made her almost indifferent whether she sank or swam. But then Amelia carried the greater guns, and was able to pour in heavier metal than her enemy could use; and she, too, swam in her own waters. Should they absolutely come to grappling and boarding, Amelia would no doubt have the best of it; but Mrs. Lupex would probably be too crafty to permit such a proceeding as that. She was, however, ready for the occasion, and greedy for the fight.

"And what of the lady?" said she, in a tone of voice that admitted of no pacific rejoinder.

"A lady, if she is a lady," said Amelia, "will know how to behave herself."

"And you're going to teach me, are you, Miss Roper? I'm sure I'm ever so much obliged to you. It's Manchester manners, I suppose, that you prefer?"

"I prefer honest manners, Mrs. Lupex, and decent manners, and manners that won't shock a whole house full of people; and I don't care whether they come from Manchester or London."

"Milliner's manners, I suppose?"

"I don't care whether they are milliner's manners or theatrical, Mrs. Lupex, as long as they're not downright bad manners—as yours are, Mrs. Lupex. And now you've got it. What are you going on for in this way with that young man, till you'll drive your husband into a madhouse with drink and jealousy?"

"Miss Roper! Miss Roper!" said Cradell; "now really——"

"Don't mind her, Mr. Cradell," said Mrs. Lupex; "she's not worthy for you to speak to. And as to that poor fellow Eames, if you've any friendship for him, you'll let him know what she is. My dear, how's Mr. Juniper, of Grogram's house, at Salford? I know all about you, and so shall John Eames too,—poor unfortunate fool of a fellow! Telling me of drink and jealousy, indeed!"

"Yes, telling you! And now you've mentioned Mr. Juniper's name, Mr. Eames, and Mr. Cradell too, may

know the whole of it. There's been nothing about Mr. Juniper that I'm ashamed of."

"It would be difficult to make you ashamed of anything, I believe."

"But let me tell you this, Mrs. Lupex, you're not going to destroy the respectability of this house by your goings on."

"It was a bad day for me when I let Lupex bring me into it."

"Then pay your bill, and walk out of it," said Amelia, waving her hand towards the door. "I'll undertake to say there shan't be any notice required. Only you pay mother what you owe, and you're free to go at once."

"I shall go just when I please, and not one hour before. Who are you, you gipsy, to speak to me in this way?"

"And as for going, go you shall, if we have to call in the police to make you."

Amelia, as at this period of the fight she stood fronting her foe with her arms akimbo, certainly seemed to have the best of the battle. But the bitterness of Mrs. Lupex's tongue had hardly yet produced its greatest results. I am inclined to think that the married lady would have silenced her who was single, had the fight been allowed to rage,—always presuming that no resort to grappling-irons took place. But at this moment Mrs. Roper entered the room, accompanied by her son, and both the combatants for a moment retreated.

"Amelia, what's all this?" said Mrs. Roper, trying to assume a look of agonized amazement.

"Ask Mrs. Lupex," said Amelia.

"And Mrs. Lupex will answer," said that lady. "Your daughter has come in here, and attacked me—in such language—before Mr. Cradell, too——"

"Why doesn't she pay what she owes, and leave the house?" said Amelia.

"Hold your tongue," said her brother. "What she owes is no affair of yours."

"But it's an affair of mine, when I'm insulted by such a creature as that."

"Creature!" said Mrs. Lupex. "I'd like to know which is most like a creature! But I'll tell you what it is, Amelia Roper——" Here, however, her eloquence was stopped, for Amelia had disappeared through the door, having been pushed out of the room by her brother. Whereupon Mrs. Lupex, having found a sofa convenient for the service, betook herself to hysterics. There for the moment we will leave her, hoping that poor Mrs. Roper was not kept late out of her bed.

"What a deuce of a mess Eames will make of it if he marries that girl!" Such was Cradell's reflection as he betook himself to his own room. But of his own part in the night's transactions he was rather proud than otherwise, feeling that the married lady's regard for him had been the cause of the battle which had raged. So, likewise, did Paris derive much gratification from the ten years' siege of Troy.

CHAPTER XII

LILIAN DALE BECOMES A BUTTERFLY

And now we will go back to Allington. The same morning that brought to John Eames the two letters which were given in the last chapter but one, brought to the Great House, among others, the following epistle for Adolphus Crosbie. It was from a countess, and was written on pink paper, beautifully creamlaid and scented, ornamented with a coronet and certain singularly-entwined initials. Altogether, the letter was very fashionable and attractive, and Adolphus Crosbie was by no means sorry to receive it.

Courcy Castle, September, 186—.

My dear Mr. Crosbie,—We have heard of you from the Gazebees, who have come down to us, and who tell us that you are rusticating at a charming little village,

in which, among other attractions, there are wood nymphs and water nymphs, to whom much of your time is devoted. As this is just the thing for your taste, I would not for worlds disturb you; but if you should ever tear yourself away from the groves and fountains of Allington, we shall be delighted to welcome you here, though you will find us very unromantic after your late Elysium.

Lady Dumbello is coming to us, who I know is a favourite of yours. Or is it the other way, and you are a favourite of hers? I did ask Lady Hartletop, but she cannot get away from the poor marquis, who is, you know, so very infirm. The duke isn't at Gatherum at present, but, of course, I don't mean that that has anything to do with dear Lady Hartletop's not coming to us. I believe we shall have the house full, and shall not want for nymphs either, though I fear they will not be of the wood and water kind. Margaretta and Alexandrina particularly want you to come, as they say you are so clever at making a houseful of people go off well. If you can give us a week before you go back to manage the affairs of the nation, pray do.

Yours very sincerely,

Rosina De Courcy.

The Countess De Courcy was a very old friend of Mr. Crosbie's; that is to say, as old friends go in the world in which he had been living. He had known her for the last six or seven years, and had been in the habit of going to all her London balls, and dancing with her daughters everywhere, in a most good-natured and affable way. He had been intimate, from old family relations, with Mr. Mortimer Gazebee, who, though only an attorney of the more distinguished kind, had married the countess's eldest daughter, and now sat in Parliament for the city of Barchester, near to which Courcy Castle was situated. And, to tell the truth honestly at once, Mr. Crosbie had been on terms of great friendship with Lady De Courcy's daughters, the Ladies Margaretta and Alexandrina—perhaps

especially so with the latter, though I would not have my readers suppose by my saying so that anything more tender than friendship had ever existed between them.

Crosbie said nothing about the letter on that morning; but during the day, or, perhaps, as he thought over the matter in bed, he made up his mind that he would accept Lady De Courcy's invitation. It was not only that he would be glad to see the Gazebees, or glad to stay in the same house with that great master in the high art of fashionable life, Lady Dumbello, or glad to renew his friendship with the Ladies Margaretta and Alexandrina. Had he felt that the circumstances of his engagement with Lily made it expedient for him to stay with her till the end of his holidays, he could have thrown over the De Courcys without a struggle. But he told himself that it would be well for him now to tear himself away from Lily; or perhaps he said that it would be well for Lily that he should be torn away. He must not teach her to think that they were to live only in the sunlight of each other's eyes during those months, or perhaps years, which must elapse before their engagement could be carried out. Nor must he allow her to suppose that either he or she were to depend solely upon the other for the amusements and employments of life. In this way he argued the matter very sensibly within his own mind, and resolved, without much difficulty, that he would go to Courcy Castle, and bask for a week in the sunlight of the fashion which would be collected there. The quiet humdrum of his own fireside would come upon him soon enough!

"I think I shall leave you on Wednesday, sir," Crosbie said to the squire at breakfast on Sunday morning.

"Leave us on Wednesday!" said the squire, who had an old-fashioned idea that people who were engaged to marry each other should remain together as long as circumstances could be made to admit of their doing so. "Nothing wrong, is there?"

"O dear, no! But everything must come to an end some day; and as I must make one or two short visits before I get back to town, I might as well go on Wednesday. Indeed, I have made it as late as I possibly could."

"Where do you go from here?" asked Bernard.

"Well, as it happens, only into the next county,—to Courcy Castle." And then there was nothing more said about the matter at that breakfast-table.

It had become their habit to meet together on the Sunday mornings before church, on the lawn belonging to the Small House, and on this day the three gentlemen walked down together, and found Lily and Bell already waiting for them. They generally had some few minutes to spare on those occasions before Mrs. Dale summoned them to pass through the house to church, and such was the case at present. The squire at these times would stand in the middle of the grass-plot, surveying his grounds, and taking stock of the shrubs, and flowers, and fruit-trees round him; for he never forgot that it was all his own, and would thus use this opportunity, as he seldom came down to see the spot on other days. Mrs. Dale, as she would see him from her own window while she was tying on her bonnet, would feel that she knew what was passing through his mind, and would regret that circumstances had forced her to be beholden to him for such assistance. But, in truth, she did not know all that he thought at such times. "It is mine," he would say to himself, as he looked around on the pleasant place. "But it is well for me that they should enjoy it. She is my brother's widow, and she is welcome;—very welcome." I think that if those two persons had known more than they did of each other's hearts and minds they might have loved each other better.

And then Crosbie told Lily of his intention. "On Wednesday!" she said, turning almost pale with emotion as she heard this news. He had told her abruptly, not thinking, probably, that such tidings would affect her so strongly.

"Well, yes. I have written to Lady De Courcy and said Wednesday. It wouldn't do for me exactly to drop everybody, and perhaps——"

"Oh, no! And, Adolphus, you don't suppose I begrudge your going. Only it does seem so sudden; does it not?"

"You see, I've been here over six weeks."

"Yes; you've been very good. When I think of it, what a six weeks it has been! I wonder whether the difference seems to you as great as it does to me. I've left off being a grub, and begun to be a butterfly."

"But you mustn't be a butterfly when you're married, Lily."

"No; not in that sense. But I meant that my real position in the world,—that for which I would fain hope that I was created,—opened to me only when I knew you and knew that you loved me. But mamma is calling us, and we must go through to church. Going on Wednesday! There are only three days more, then!"

"Yes, just three days," he said, as he took her on his arm and passed through the house on to the road.

"And when are we to see you again?" she asked, as they reached the churchyard.

"Ah, who is to say that yet? We must ask the Chairman of Committees when he will let me go again." Then there was nothing more said, and they all followed the squire through the little porch and up to the big family-pew in which they all sat. Here the squire took his place in one special corner which he had occupied ever since his father's death, and from which he read the responses loudly and plainly,—so loudly and plainly, that the parish clerk could by no means equal him, though with emulous voice he still made the attempt. "T' squire 'd like to be squire, and parson, and clerk, and everything; so a would," the poor clerk would say, when complaining of the ill-usage which he suffered.

If Lily's prayers were interrupted by her new sorrow, I think that her fault in that respect would be forgiven. Of course she had known that Crosbie was not going

to remain at Allington much longer. She knew quite as well as he did the exact day on which his leave of absence came to its end, and the hour at which it behoved him to walk into his room at the General Committee Office. She had taught herself to think that he would remain with them up to the end of his vacation, and now she felt as a schoolboy would feel who was told suddenly, a day or two before the time, that the last week of his holidays was to be taken from him. The grievance would have been slight had she known it from the first; but what schoolboy could stand such a shock, when the loss amounted to two-thirds of his remaining wealth? Lily did not blame her lover. She did not even think that he ought to stay. She would not allow herself to suppose that he could propose anything that was unkind. But she felt her loss, and more than once, as she knelt at her prayers, she wiped a hidden tear from her eyes.

Crosbie also was thinking of his departure more than he should have done during Mr. Boyce's sermon. "It's easy listening to him," Mrs. Hearn used to say of her husband's successor. "It don't give one much trouble following him into his arguments." Mr. Crosbie perhaps found the difficulty greater than did Mrs. Hearn, and would have devoted his mind more perfectly to the discourse had the argument been deeper. It is very hard, that necessity of listening to a man who says nothing. On this occasion Crosbie ignored the necessity altogether, and gave up his mind to the consideration of what it might be expedient that he should say to Lily before he went. He remembered well those few words which he had spoken in the first ardour of his love, pleading that an early day might be fixed for their marriage. And he remembered, also, how prettily Lily had yielded to him. "Only do not let it be too soon," she had said. Now he must unsay what he had then said. He must plead against his own pleadings, and explain to her that he desired to postpone the marriage rather than to hasten it—a task which, I presume, must always be an unpleasant one

for any man engaged to be married. "I might as well do it at once," he said to himself, as he bobbed his head forward into his hands by way of returning thanks for the termination of Mr. Boyce's sermon.

As he had only three days left, it was certainly as well that he should do this at once. Seeing that Lily had no fortune, she could not in justice complain of a prolonged engagement. That was the argument which he used in his own mind. But he as often told himself that she would have very great ground of complaint if she were left for a day unnecessarily in doubt as to this matter. Why had he rashly spoken those hasty words to her in his love, betraying himself into all manner of scrapes, as a schoolboy might do, or such a one as Johnny Eames? What an ass he had been not to have remembered himself and to have been collected,—not to have bethought himself on the occasion of all that might be due to Adolphus Crosbie! And then the idea came upon him whether he had not altogether made himself an ass in this matter. And as he gave his arm to Lily outside the church-door, he shrugged his shoulders while making that reflection. "It is too late now," he said to himself; and then turned round and made some sweet little loving speech to her. Adolphus Crosbie was a clever man; and he meant also to be a true man,—if only the temptations to falsehood might not be too great for him.

"Lily," he said to her, "will you walk in the fields after lunch?"

Walk in the fields with him! Of course she would. There were only three days left, and would she not give up to him every moment of her time, if he would accept of all her moments? And then they lunched at the Small House, Mrs. Dale having promised to join the dinner-party at the squire's table. The squire did not eat any lunch, excusing himself on the plea that lunch in itself was a bad thing. "He can eat lunch at his own house," Mrs. Dale afterwards said to Bell. "And I've often seen him take a glass of sherry." While thinking of this, Mrs. Dale made her own

dinner. If her brother-in-law would not eat at her board, neither would she eat at his.

And then in a few minutes Lily had on her hat, in place of that decorous, church-going bonnet which Crosbie was wont to abuse with a lover's privilege, feeling well assured that he might say what he liked of the bonnet as long as he would praise the hat. "Only three days," she said, as she walked down with him across the lawn at a quick pace. But she said it in a voice which made no complaint,—which seemed to say simply this,—that as the good time was to be so short, they must make the most of it. And what compliment could be paid to a man so sweet as that? What flattery could be more gratifying? All my earthly heaven is with you; and now, for the delight of these immediately present months or so, there are left to me but three days of this heaven! Come, then; I will make the most of what happiness is given to me. Crosbie felt it all as she felt it, and recognized the extent of the debt he owed her. "I'll come down to them for a day at Christmas, though it be only for a day," he said to himself. Then he reflected that as such was his intention, it might be well for him to open his present conversation with a promise to that effect.

"Yes, Lily; there are only three days left now. But I wonder whether—— I suppose you'll all be at home at Christmas?"

"At home at Christmas?—of course we shall be at home. You don't mean to say you'll come to us!"

"Well; I think I will, if you'll have me."

"Oh! that will make such a difference. Let me see, That will only be three months. And to have you here on Christmas Day! I would sooner have you then than on any other day in the year."

"It will only be for one day, Lily. I shall come to dinner on Christmas Eve, and must go away the day after."

"But you will come direct to our house!"

"If you can spare me a room."

"Of course we can. So we could now. Only when

you came, you know——" Then she looked up into his face and smiled.

"When I came, I was the squire's friend and your cousin's, rather than yours. But that's all changed now."

"Yes; you're my friend now,—mine specially. I'm to be now and always your own special, dearest friend; —eh, Adolphus?" And then she exacted from him the repetition of the promise which he had so often given her.

By this time they had passed through the grounds of the Great House and were in the fields. "Lily," said he, speaking rather suddenly, and making her feel by his manner that something of importance was to be said; "I want to say a few words to you about,— business." And he gave a little laugh as he spoke the last word, making her fully understand that he was not quite at his ease.

"Of course I'll listen. And, Adolphus, pray don't be afraid about me. What I mean is, don't think that I can't bear cares and troubles. I can bear anything as long as you love me. I say that because I'm afraid I seemed to complain about your going. I didn't mean to."

"I never thought you complained, dearest. Nothing can be better than you are at all times and in every way. A man would be very hard to please if you didn't please him."

"If I can only please you——"

"You do please me, in everything. Dear Lily, I think I found an angel when I found you. But now about this business. Perhaps I'd better tell you everything."

"Oh, yes, tell me everything."

"But then you mustn't misunderstand me. And if I talk about money, you mustn't suppose that it has anything to do with my love for you."

"I wish for your sake that I wasn't such a little pauper."

"What I mean to say is this, that if I seem to be

anxious about money, you must not suppose that that anxiety bears any reference whatever to my affection for you. I should love you just the same, and look forward just as much to my happiness in marrying you, whether you were rich or poor. You understand that?"

She did not quite understand him; but she merely pressed his arm, so as to encourage him to go on. She presumed that he intended to tell her something as to their future mode of life—something which he supposed it might not be pleasant for her to hear, and she was determined to show him that she would receive it pleasantly.

"You know," said he, "how anxious I have been that our marriage should not be delayed. To me, of course, it must be everything now to call you my own as soon as possible." In answer to which little declaration of love, she merely pressed his arm again, the subject being one on which she had not herself much to say.

"Of course I must be very anxious, but I find it not so easy as I expected."

"You know what I said, Adolphus. I said that I thought we had better wait. I'm sure mamma thinks so. And if we can only see you now and then——"

"That will be a matter of course. But, as I was saying—— Let me see. Yes,—all that waiting will be intolerable to me. It is such a bore for a man when he has made up his mind on such a matter as marriage, not to make the change at once, especially when he is going to take to himself such a little angel as you are," and as he spoke these loving words, his arm was again put round her waist; "but——" and then he stopped. He wanted to make her understand that this change of intention on his part was caused by the unexpected misconduct of her uncle. He desired that she should know exactly how the matter stood; that he had been led to suppose that her uncle would give her some small fortune; that he had been disappointed, and had a right to feel the

disappointment keenly; and that in consequence of this blow to his expectations, he must put off his marriage. But he wished her also to understand at the same time that this did not in the least mar his love for her; that he did not join her at all in her uncle's fault. All this he was anxious to convey to her, but he did not know how to get it said in a manner that would not be offensive to her personally, and that should not appear to accuse himself of sordid motives. He had begun by declaring that he would tell her all; but sometimes it is not easy, that task of telling a person everything. There are things which will not get themselves told.

"You mean, dearest," said she, "that you cannot afford to marry at once."

"Yes; that is it. I had expected that I should be able, but——"

Did any man in love ever yet find himself able to tell the lady whom he loved that he was very much disappointed on discovering that she had got no money? If so, his courage, I should say, was greater than his love. Crosbie found himself unable to do it, and thought himself cruelly used because of the difficulty. The delay to which he intended to subject her was occasioned, as he felt, by the squire, and not by himself. He was ready to do his part, if only the squire had been willing to do the part which properly belonged to him. The squire would not; and, therefore, neither could he,—not as yet. Justice demanded that all this should be understood; but when he came to the telling of it, he found that the story would not form itself properly. He must let the thing go, and bear the injustice, consoling himself as best he might by the reflection that he at least was behaving well in the matter.

"It won't make me unhappy, Adolphus."

"Will it not?" said he. "As regards myself, I own that I cannot bear the delay with so much indifference."

"Nay, my love; but you should not misunderstand me," she said, stopping and facing him on the path

in which they were walking. "I suppose I ought to protest, according to the common rules, that I would rather wait. Young ladies are expected to say so. If you were pressing me to marry at once, I should say so, no doubt. But now, as it is, I will be more honest. I have only one wish in the world, and that is, to be your wife,—to be able to share everything with you. The sooner we can be together the better it will be,—at any rate, for me. There; will that satisfy you?"

"My own, own Lily!"

"Yes, your own Lily. You shall have no cause to doubt me, dearest. But I do not expect that I am to have everything exactly as I want it. I say again, that I shall not be unhappy in waiting. How can I be unhappy while I feel certain of your love? I was disappointed just now when you said that you were going so soon; and I am afraid I showed it. But those little things are more unendurable than the big things."

"Yes; that's very true."

"But there are three more days, and I mean to enjoy them so much! And then you will write to me: and you will come at Christmas. And next year, when you have your holiday, you will come down to us again; will you not?"

"You may be quite sure of that."

"And so the time will go by till it suits you to come and take me. I shall not be unhappy."

"I, at any rate, shall be impatient."

"Ah, men always are impatient. It is one of their privileges, I suppose. And I don't think that a man ever has the same positive and complete satisfaction in knowing that he is loved, which a girl feels. You are my bird that I have shot with my own gun; and the assurance of my success is sufficient for my happiness."

"You have bowled me over, and know that I can't get up again."

"I don't know about can't. I would let you up quick enough, if you wished it."

How he made his loving assurance that he did not

wish it, never would or could wish it, the reader will readily understand. And then he considered that he might as well leave all those money questions as they now stood. His real object had been to convince her that their joint circumstances did not admit of an immediate marriage; and as to that she completely understood him. Perhaps, during the next three days, some opportunity might arise for explaining the whole matter to Mrs. Dale. At any rate, he had declared his own purpose honestly, and no one could complain of him.

On the following day they all rode over to Guestwick together,—the all consisting of the two girls, with Bernard and Crosbie. Their object was to pay two visits,—one to their very noble and highly exalted ally, the Lady Julia De Guest; and the other to their much humbler and better known friend, Mrs. Eames. As Guestwick Manor lay on their road into the town, they performed the grander ceremony the first. The present Earl De Guest, brother of that Lady Fanny who ran away with Major Dale, was an unmarried nobleman, who devoted himself chiefly to the breeding of cattle. And as he bred very good cattle, taking infinite satisfaction in the employment, devoting all his energies thereto, and abstaining from all prominently evil courses, it should be acknowledged that he was not a bad member of society. He was a thorough-going old Tory, whose proxy was always in the hand of the leader of his party; and who seldom himself went near the metropolis, unless called thither by some occasion of cattle-showing. He was a short, stumpy man, with red cheeks and a round face; who was usually to be seen till dinner-time dressed in a very old shooting coat, with breeches, gaiters, and very thick shoes. He lived generally out of doors, and was almost as great in the preserving of game as in the breeding of oxen. He knew every acre of his own estate, and every tree upon it, as thoroughly as a lady knows the ornaments in her drawing-room. There was no gap in a fence of which he did not remember the exact bearings, no path

hither or thither as to which he could not tell the why and the wherefore. He had been in his earlier years a poor man as regarded his income,—very poor, seeing that he was an earl. But he was not at present by any means an impoverished man, having been taught a lesson by the miseries of his father and grandfather, and having learned to live within his means. Now, as he was going down the vale of years, men said that he was becoming rich, and that he had ready money to spend,—a position in which no Lord De Guest had found himself for many generations back. His father and grandfather had been known as spendthrifts; and now men said that this earl was a miser.

There was not much of nobility in his appearance; but they greatly mistook Lord De Guest who conceived that on that account his pride of place was not dear to his soul. His peerage dated back to the time of King John, and there were but three lords in England whose patents had been conferred before his own. He knew what privileges were due to him on behalf of his blood, and was not disposed to abate one jot of them. He was not loud in demanding them. As he went through the world he sent no trumpeters to the right or left, proclaiming that the Earl De Guest was coming. When he spread his board for his friends, which he did but on rare occasions, he entertained them simply, with a mild, tedious, old-fashioned courtesy. We may say that, if properly treated, the earl never walked over anybody. But he could, if ill-treated, be grandly indignant; and if attacked, could hold his own against all the world. He knew himself to be every inch an earl, pottering about after his oxen with his muddy gaiters and red cheeks, as much as though he were glittering with stars in courtly royal ceremonies among his peers at Westminster;—ay, more an earl than any of those who use their nobility for pageant purposes. Woe be to him who should mistake that old coat for a badge of rural degradation! Now and again some unlucky wight did make such a mistake, and had to do his penance very uncomfortably.

With the earl lived a maiden sister, the Lady Julia. Bernard Dale's father had, in early life, run away with one sister, but no suitor had been fortunate enough to induce the Lady Julia to run with him. Therefore she still lived, in maiden blessedness, as mistress of Guestwick Manor; and as such had no mean opinion of the high position which destiny had called upon her to fill. She was a tedious, dull, virtuous old woman, who gave herself infinite credit for having remained all her days in the home of her youth, probably forgetting, in her present advanced years, that her temptations to leave it had not been strong or numerous. She generally spoke of her sister Fanny with some little contempt, as though that poor lady had degraded herself in marrying a younger brother. She was as proud of her own position as was the earl her brother, but her pride was maintained with more of outward show and less of inward nobility. It was hardly enough for her that the world should know that she was a De Guest, and therefore she had assumed little pompous ways and certain airs of condescension which did not make her popular with her neighbours.

The intercourse between Guestwick Manor and Allington was not very frequent or very cordial. Soon after the running away of the Lady Fanny, the two families had agreed to acknowledge their connection with each other, and to let it be known by the world that they were on friendly terms. Either that course was necessary to them, or the other course, of letting it be known that they were enemies. Friendship was the less troublesome, and therefore the two families called on each other from time to time, and gave each other dinners about once a year. The earl regarded the squire as a man who had deserted his politics, and had thereby forfeited the respect due to him as an hereditary land magnate; and the squire was wont to be-little the earl as one who understood nothing of the outer world. At Guestwick Manor Bernard was to some extent a favourite. He was actually a relative, having in his veins blood of the De Guests, and was

not the less a favourite because he was the heir to Allington, and because the blood of the Dales was older even than that of the noble family to which he was allied. When Bernard should come to be the squire, then indeed there might be cordial relations between Guestwick Manor and Allington; unless, indeed, the earl's heir and the squire's heir should have some fresh cause of ill-will between themselves.

They found Lady Julia sitting in her drawing-room alone, and introduced to her Mr. Crosbie in due form. The fact of Lily's engagement was of course known at the manor, and it was quite understood that her intended husband was now brought over that he might be looked at and approved. Lady Julia made a very elaborate curtsey, and expressed a hope that her young friend might be made happy in that sphere of life to which it had pleased God to call her.

"I hope I shall, Lady Julia," said Lily, with a little laugh; "at any rate I mean to try."

"We all try, my dear, but many of us fail to try with sufficient energy of purpose. It is only by doing our duty that we can hope to be happy, whether in single life or in married."

"Miss Dale means to be a dragon of perfection in the performance of hers," said Crosbie.

"A dragon!" said Lady Julia. "No; I hope Miss Lily Dale will never become a dragon." And then she turned to her nephew. It may be as well to say at once that she never forgave Mr. Crosbie the freedom of the expression which he had used. He had been in the drawing-room of Guestwick Manor for two minutes only, and it did not become him to talk about dragons. "Bernard," she said, "I heard from your mother yesterday. I am afraid she does not seem to be very strong." And then there was a little conversation, not very interesting in its nature, between the aunt and the nephew as to the general health of Lady Fanny.

"I didn't know my aunt was so unwell," said Bell.

"She isn't ill," said Bernard. "She never is ill; but then she is never well."

"Your aunt," said Lady Julia, seeming to put a touch of sarcasm into the tone of her voice as she repeated the word—"your aunt has never enjoyed good health since she left this house; but that is a long time ago."

"A very long time," said Crosbie, who was not accustomed to be left in his chair silent. "You, Dale, at any rate, can hardly remember it."

"But I can remember it," said Lady Julia, gathering herself up. "I can remember when my sister Fanny was recognized as the beauty of the country. It is a dangerous gift, that of beauty."

"Very dangerous," said Crosbie. Then Lily laughed again, and Lady Julia became more angry than ever. What odious man was this whom her neighbours were going to take into their very bosom! But she had heard of Mr. Crosbie before, and Mr. Crosbie also had heard of her.

"By-the-by, Lady Julia," said he, "I think I know some very dear friends of yours."

"Very dear friends is a very strong word. I have not many very dear friends."

"I mean the Gazebees. I have heard Mortimer Gazebee and Lady Amelia speak of you."

Whereupon Lady Julia confessed that she did know the Gazebees. Mr. Gazebee, she said, was a man who in early life had wanted many advantages, but still he was a very estimable person. He was now in Parliament, and she understood that he was making himself useful. She had not quite approved of Lady Amelia's marriage at the time, and so she had told her very old friend Lady De Courcy; but—— And then Lady Julia said many words in praise of Mr. Gazebee, which seemed to amount to this; that he was an excellent sort of man, with a full conviction of the too great honour done to him by the earl's daughter who had married him, and a complete consciousness that even that marriage had not put him on a par with his wife's relations, or even with his wife. And then it came out that Lady Julia in the course of the next week was going to meet the Gazebees at Courcy Castle.

"I am delighted to think that I shall have the pleasure of seeing you there," said Crosbie.

"Indeed!" said Lady Julia.

"I am going to Courcy on Wednesday. That, I fear, will be too early to allow of my being of any service to your ladyship."

Lady Julia drew herself up, and declined the escort which Mr. Crosbie had seemed to offer. It grieved her to find that Lily Dale's future husband was an intimate friend of her friend's, and it especially grieved her to find that he was now going to that friend's house. It was a grief to her, and she showed that it was. It also grieved Crosbie to find that Lady Julia was to be a fellow guest with himself at Courcy Castle; but he did not show it. He expressed nothing but smiles and civil self-congratulation on the matter, pretending that he would have much delight in again meeting Lady Julia; but, in truth, he would have given much could he have invented any manœuvre by which her ladyship might have been kept at home.

"What a horrid old woman she is," said Lily, as they rode back down the avenue. "I beg your pardon, Bernard; for, of course, she is your aunt."

"Yes; she is my aunt; and though I am not very fond of her, I deny that she is a horrid old woman. She never murdered anybody, or robbed anybody, or stole away any other woman's lover."

"I should think not," said Lily.

"She says her prayers earnestly I have no doubt," continued Bernard, "and gives away money to the poor, and would sacrifice to-morrow any desire of her own to her brother's wish. I acknowledge that she is ugly, and pompous, and that, being a woman, she ought not to have such a long black beard on her upper lip."

"I don't care a bit about her beard," said Lily. "But why did she tell me to do my duty? I didn't go there to have a sermon preached to me."

"And why did she talk about beauty being dangerous?" said Bell. "Of course, we all knew what she meant."

"I didn't know at all what she meant," said Lily; "and I don't know now."

"I think she's a charming woman, and I shall be especially civil to her at Lady De Courcy's," said Crosbie.

And in this way, saying hard things of the poor old spinster whom they had left, they made their way into Guestwick, and again dismounted at Mrs. Eames's door.

CHAPTER XIII

A VISIT TO GUESTWICK

As the party from Allington rode up the narrow High-street of Guestwick, and across the market square towards the small, respectable, but very dull row of new houses in which Mrs. Eames lived, the people of Guestwick were all aware that Miss Lily Dale was escorted by her future husband. The opinion that she had been a very fortunate girl was certainly general among the Guestwickians, though it was not always expressed in open or generous terms. "It was a great match for her," some said, but shook their heads at the same time, hinting that Mr. Crosbie's life in London was not all that it should be, and suggesting that she might have been more safe had she been content to bestow herself upon some country neighbour of less dangerous pretensions. Others declared that it was no such great match after all. They knew his income to a penny, and believed that the young people would find it very difficult to keep a house in London unless the old squire intended to assist them. But, nevertheless, Lily was envied as she rode through the town with her handsome lover by her side.

And she was very happy. I will not deny that she had some feeling of triumphant satisfaction in the knowledge that she was envied. Such a feeling on

her part was natural, and is natural to all men and women who are conscious that they have done well in the adjustment of their own affairs. As she herself had said, he was her bird, the spoil of her own gun, the product of such capacity as she had in her, on which she was to live, and, if possible, to thrive during the remainder of her life. Lily fully recognized the importance of the thing she was doing, and, in soberest guise, had thought much of this matter of marriage. But the more she thought of it the more satisfied she was that she was doing well. And yet she knew that there was a risk. He who was now everything to her might die; nay, it was possible that he might be other than she thought him to be; that he might neglect her, desert her, or misuse her. But she had resolved to trust in everything, and, having so trusted, she would not provide for herself any possibility of retreat. Her ship should go out into the middle ocean, beyond all ken of the secure port from which it had sailed; her army should fight its battle with no hope of other safety than that which victory gives. All the world might know that she loved him if all the world chose to inquire about the matter. She triumphed in her lover, and did not deny even to herself that she was triumphant.

Mrs. Eames was delighted to see them. It was so good in Mr. Crosbie to come over and call upon such a poor, forlorn woman as her, and so good in Captain Dale; so good also in the dear girls, who, at the present moment, had so much to make them happy at home at Allington! Little things, accounted as bare civilities by others, were esteemed as great favours by Mrs. Eames.

"And dear Mrs. Dale? I hope she was not fatigued when we kept her up the other night so unconscionably late?" Bell and Lily both assured her that their mother was none the worse for what she had gone through; and then Mrs. Eames got up and left the room, with the declared purpose of looking for John and Mary, but bent, in truth, on the production of

some cake and sweet wine which she kept under lock and key in the little parlour.

"Don't let's stay here very long," whispered Crosbie.

"No, not very long," said Lily. "But when you come to see my friends you mustn't be in a hurry, Mr. Crosbie."

"He had his turn with Lady Julia," said Bell, "and we must have ours now."

"At any rate, Mrs. Eames won't tell us to do our duty and to beware of being too beautiful," said Lily.

Mary and John came into the room before their mother returned; then came Mrs. Eames, and a few minutes afterwards the cake and wine arrived. It certainly was rather dull, as none of the party seemed to be at their ease. The grandeur of Mr. Crosbie was too great for Mrs. Eames and her daughter, and John was almost silenced by the misery of his position. He had not yet answered Miss Roper's letter, nor had he even made up his mind whether he would answer it or no. And then the sight of Lily's happiness did not fill him with all that friendly joy which he should perhaps have felt as the friend of her childhood. To tell the truth, he hated Crosbie, and so he had told himself; and had so told his sister also very frequently since the day of the party.

"I tell you what it is, Molly," he had said, "if there was any way of doing it, I'd fight that man."

"What; and make Lily wretched?"

"She'll never be happy with him. I'm sure she won't. I don't want to do her any harm, but yet I'd like to fight that man,—if I only knew how to manage it."

And then he bethought himself that if they could both be slaughtered in such an encounter it would be the only fitting termination to the present state of things. In that way, too, there would be an escape from Amelia, and, at the present moment, he saw none other.

When he entered the room he shook hands with all the party from Allington, but, as he told his sister

afterwards, his flesh crept when he touched Crosbie. Crosbie, as he contemplated the Eames family sitting stiff and ill at ease in their own drawing-room chairs, made up his mind that it would be well that his wife should see as little of John Eames as might be when she came to London;—not that he was in any way jealous of her lover. He had learned everything from Lily,—all, at least, that Lily knew,—and regarded the matter rather as a good joke. "Don't see him too often," he had said to her, "for fear he should make an ass of himself." Lily had told him everything,—all that she could tell; but yet he did not in the least comprehend that Lily had, in truth, a warm affection for the young man whom he despised.

"Thank you, no," said Crosbie. "I never do take wine in the middle of the day."

"But a bit of cake?" And Mrs. Eames by her look implored him to do her so much honour. She implored Captain Dale, also, but they were both inexorable. I do not know that the two girls were at all more inclined to eat and drink than the two men; but they understood that Mrs. Eames would be broken-hearted if no one partook of her delicacies. The little sacrifices of society are all made by women, as are also the great sacrifices of life. A man who is good for anything is always ready for his duty, and so is a good woman always ready for a sacrifice.

"We really must go now," said Bell, "because of the horses." And under this excuse they got away.

"You will come over before you go back to London, John?" said Lily, as he came out with the intention of helping her mount, from which purpose, however, he was forced to recede by the iron will of Mr. Crosbie.

"Yes, I'll come over again—before I go. Good-by."

"Good-by, John," said Bell. "Good-by, Eames," said Captain Dale. Crosbie, as he seated himself in the saddle, made the very slightest sign of recognition, to which his rival would not condescend to pay any attention. "I'll manage to have a fight with him in some way," said Eames to himself as he walked back

through the passage of his mother's house. And Crosbie, as he settled his feet in the stirrups, felt that he disliked the young man more and more. It would be monstrous to suppose that there could be aught of jealousy in the feeling; and yet he did dislike him very strongly, and felt almost angry with Lily for asking him to come again to Allington. "I must put an end to all that," he said to himself as he rode silently out of town.

"You must not snub my friends, sir," said Lily, smiling as she spoke, but yet with something of earnestness in her voice. They were out of the town by this time, and Crosbie had hardly uttered a word since they had left Mrs. Eames's door. They were now on the high road, and Bell and Bernard Dale were somewhat in advance of them.

"I never snub anybody," said Crosbie petulantly; "that is, unless they have absolutely deserved snubbing."

"And have I deserved it? Because I seem to have got it," said Lily.

"Nonsense, Lily. I never snubbed you yet, and I don't think it likely that I shall begin. But you ought not to accuse me of not being civil to your friends. In the first place I am as civil to them as my nature will allow me to be. And, in the second place——"

"Well; in the second place——?"

"I am not quite sure that you are very wise to encourage that young man's—friendship just at present."

"That means, I suppose, that I am very wrong to do so?"

"No, dearest, it does not mean that. If I meant so I would tell you so honestly. I mean just what I say. There can, I suppose, be no doubt that he has filled himself with some kind of romantic attachment for you,—a foolish kind of love which I don't suppose he ever expected to gratify, but the idea of which lends a sort of grace to his life. When he meets some young woman fit to be his wife he will forget all about it,

but till then he will go about fancying himself a despairing lover. And then such a young man as John Eames is very apt to talk of his fancies."

"I don't believe for a moment that he would mention my name to any one."

"But, Lily, perhaps I may know more of young men than you do."

"Yes, of course you do."

"And I can assure you that they are generally too well inclined to make free with the names of girls whom they think that they like. You must not be surprised if I am unwilling that any man should make free with your name."

After this Lily was silent for a minute or two. She felt that an injustice was being done to her and she was not inclined to put up with it, but she could not quite see where the injustice lay. A great deal was owing from her to Crosbie. In very much she was bound to yield to him, and she was anxious to do on his behalf even more than her duty. But yet she had a strong conviction that it would not be well that she should give way to him in everything. She wished to think as he thought as far as possible, but she could not say that she agreed with him when she knew that she differed from him. John Eames was an old friend whom she could not abandon, and so much at the present time she felt herself obliged to say.

"But, Adolphus——"

"Well, dearest?"

"You would not wish me to be unkind to so very old a friend as John Eames? I have known him all my life, and we have all of us had a very great regard for the whole family. His father was my uncle's most particular friend."

"I think, Lily, you must understand what I mean. I don't want you to quarrel with any of them, or to be what you call unkind. But you need not give special and pressing invitations to this young man to come and see you before he goes back to London, and then to come and see you directly you get to London.

You tell me that he has some kind of romantic idea of being in love with you;—of being in despair because you are not in love with him. It's all great nonsense, no doubt, but it seems to me that under such circumstances you'd better—just leave him alone."

Again Lily was silent. These were her three last days, in which it was her intention to be especially happy, but above all things to make him especially happy. On no account would she say to him sharp words, or encourage in her own heart a feeling of animosity against him, and yet she believed him to be wrong; and so believing could hardly bring herself to bear the injury. Such was her nature, as a Dale. And let it be remembered that very many who can devote themselves for great sacrifices, cannot bring themselves to the endurance of little injuries. Lily could have given up any gratification for her lover, but she could not allow herself to have been in the wrong, believing herself to have been in the right.

"I have asked him now, and he must come," she said.

"But do not press him to come any more."

"Certainly not, after what you have said, Adolphus. If he comes over to Allington, he will see me in mamma's house, to which he has always been made welcome by her. Of course I understand perfectly——"

"You understand what, Lily?"

But she had stopped herself, fearing that she might say that which would be offensive to him if she continued.

"What is it you understand, Lily?"

"Do not press me to go on, Adolphus. As far as I can, I will do all that you want me to do."

"You meant to say that when you find yourself an inmate of my house, as a matter of course you could not ask your own friends to come and see you. Was that gracious?"

"Whatever I may have meant to say, I did not say that. Nor in truth did I mean it. Pray don't go

on about it now. These are to be our last days, you know, and we shouldn't waste them by talking of things that are unpleasant. After all poor Johnny Eames is nothing to me; nothing, nothing. How can any one be anything to me when I think of you?"

But even this did not bring Crosbie back at once into a pleasant humour. Had Lily yielded to him and confessed that he was right, he would have made himself at once as pleasant as the sun in May. But this she had not done. She had simply abstained from her argument because she did not choose to be vexed, and had declared her continued purpose of seeing Eames on his promised visit. Crosbie would have had her acknowledge herself wrong, and would have delighted in the privilege of forgiving her. But Lily Dale was one who did not greatly relish forgiveness, or any necessity of being forgiven. So they rode on, if not in silence, without much joy in their conversation. It was now late on the Monday afternoon, and Crosbie was to go early on the Wednesday morning. What if these three last days should come to be marred with such terrible drawbacks as these!

Bernard Dale had not spoken a word to his cousin of his suit, since they had been interrupted by Crosbie and Lily as they were lying on the bank by the ha-ha. He had danced with her again and again at Mrs. Dale's party, and had seemed to revert to his old modes of conversation without difficulty. Bell, therefore, had believed the matter to be over, and was thankful to her cousin, declaring within her own bosom that the whole matter should be treated by her as though it had never happened. To no one,—not even to her mother, would she tell it. To such reticence she bound herself for his sake, feeling that he would be best pleased that it should be so. But now as they rode on together, far in advance of the other couple, he again returned to the subject.

"Bell," said he, "am I to have any hope?"

"Any hope as to what, Bernard?"

"I hardly know whether a man is bound to take a

single answer on such a subject. But this I know, that if a man's heart is concerned, he is not very willing to do so."

"When that answer has been given honestly and truly——"

"Oh, no doubt. I don't at all suppose that you were dishonest or false when you refused to allow me to speak to you."

"But, Bernard, I did not refuse to allow you to speak to me."

"Something very like it. But, however, I have no doubt you were true enough. But, Bell, why should it be so? If you were in love with any one else I could understand it."

"I am not in love with any one else."

"Exactly. And there are so many reasons why you and I should join our fortunes together."

"It cannot be a question of fortune, Bernard."

"Do listen to me. Do let me speak, at any rate. I presume I may at least suppose that you do not dislike me."

"Oh, no."

"And though you might not be willing to accept any man's hand merely on a question of fortune, surely the fact that our marriage would be in every way suitable as regards money should not set you against it. Of my own love for you I will not speak further, as I do not doubt that you believe what I say; but should you not question your own feelings very closely before you determine to oppose the wishes of all those who are nearest to you?"

"Do you mean mamma, Bernard?"

"Not her especially, though I cannot but think she would like a marriage that would keep all the family together, and would give an equal claim to the property to that which I have."

"That would not have a feather's-weight with mamma."

"Have you asked her?"

"No, I have mentioned the matter to no one."

"Then you cannot know. And as to my uncle, I have the means of knowing that it is the great desire of his life. I must say that I think some consideration for him should induce you to pause before you give a final answer, even though no consideration for me should have any weight with you."

"I would do more for you than for him,—much more."

"Then do this for me. Allow me to think that I have not yet had an answer to my proposal; give me to this day month, to Christmas; till any time that you like to name, so that I may think that it is not yet settled, and may tell uncle Christopher that such is the case."

"Bernard, it would be useless."

"It would at any rate show him that you are willing to think of it."

"But I am not willing to think of it;—not in that way. I do know my own mind thoroughly, and I should be very wrong if I were to deceive you."

"And you wish me to give that as your only answer to my uncle?"

"To tell the truth, Bernard, I do not much care what you may say to my uncle in this matter. He can have no right to interfere in the disposal of my hand, and therefore I need not regard his wishes on the subject. I will explain to you in one word what my feelings are about it. I would accept no man in opposition to mamma's wishes; but not even for her could I accept any man in opposition to my own. But as concerns my uncle, I do not feel myself called on to consult him in any way on such a matter."

"And yet he is the head of our family."

"I don't care anything about the family,—not in that way."

"And he has been very generous to you all."

"That I deny. He has not been generous to mamma. He is very hard and ungenerous to mamma. He lets her have that house because he is anxious that the Dales should seem to be respectable before the

world; and she lives in it, because she thinks it better for us that she should do so. If I had my way, she should leave it to-morrow—or, at any rate, as soon as Lily is married. I would much sooner go into Guestwick, and live as the Eames do."

"I think you are ungrateful, Bell."

"No; I am not ungrateful. And as to consulting, Bernard,—I should be much more inclined to consult you than him about my marriage. If you would let me look on you altogether as a brother, I should think little of promising to marry no one whom you did not approve."

But such an agreement between them would by no means have suited Bernard's views. He had thought, some four or five weeks back, that he was not personally very anxious for this match. He had declared to himself that he liked his cousin well enough; that it would be a good thing for him to settle himself; that his uncle was reasonable in his wishes and sufficiently liberal in his offers; and that, therefore, he would marry. It had hardly occurred to him as probable that his cousin would reject so eligible an offer, and had certainly never occurred to him that he would have to suffer anything from such rejection. He had entertained none of that feeling of which lovers speak when they declare that they are staking their all upon the hazard of a die. It had not seemed to him that he was staking anything, as he gently told his tale of languid love, lying on the turf by the ha-ha. He had not regarded the possibility of disappointment, of sorrow, and of a deeply-vexed mind. He would have felt but little triumph if accepted, and had not thought that he could be humiliated by any rejection. In this frame of mind he had gone to his work; but now he found, to his own surprise, that this girl's answer had made him absolutely unhappy. Having expressed a wish for this thing, the very expression of the wish made him long to possess it. He found, as he rode along silently by her side, that he was capable of more earnestness of desire than he had known himself to possess. He

was at this moment unhappy, disappointed, anxious, distrustful of the future, and more intent on one special toy than he had ever been before, even as a boy. He was vexed, and felt himself to be sore at heart. He looked round at her, as she sat silent, quiet, and somewhat sad upon her pony, and declared to himself that she was very beautiful,—that she was a thing to be gained if still there might be the possibility of gaining her. He felt that he really loved her, and yet he was almost angry with himself for so feeling. Why had he subjected himself to this numbing weakness? His love had never given him any pleasure. Indeed he had never hitherto acknowledged it; but now he was driven to do so on finding it to be the source of trouble and pain. I think it is open to us to doubt whether, even yet, Bernard Dale was in love with his cousin; whether he was not rather in love with his own desire. But against himself he found a verdict that he was in love, and was angry with himself and with all the world.

"Ah, Bell," he said, coming close up to her, "I wish you could understand how I love you." And, as he spoke, his cousin unconsciously recognized more of affection in his tone, and less of that spirit of bargaining which had seemed to pervade all his former pleas, than she had ever found before.

"And do I not love you? Have I not offered to be to you in all respects as a sister?"

"That is nothing. Such an offer to me now is simply laughing at me. Bell, I tell you what,—I will not give you up. The fact is, you do not know me yet,—not know me as you must know any man before you choose him for your husband. You and Lily are not alike in this. You are cautious, doubtful of yourself, and perhaps, also, somewhat doubtful of others. My heart is set upon this, and I shall still try to succeed."

"Ah, Bernard, do not say that! Believe me, when I tell you that it can never be."

"No; I will not believe you. I will not allow myself

to be made utterly wretched. I tell you fairly that I will not believe you. I may surely hope if I choose to hope. No, Bell, I will never give you up,—unless indeed, I should see you become another man's wife."

As he said this, they all turned in through the squire's gate, and rode up to the yard in which it was their habit to dismount from their horses.

CHAPTER XIV

JOHN EAMES TAKES A WALK

John Eames watched the party of cavaliers as they rode away from his mother's door, and then started upon a solitary walk, as soon as the noise of the horses' hoofs had passed away out of the street. He was by no means happy in his mind as he did so. Indeed, he was overwhelmed with care and trouble, and as he went along very gloomy thoughts passed through his mind. Had he not better go to Australia, or Vancouver's Island, or——? I will not name the places which the poor fellow suggested to himself as possible terminations of the long journeys which he might not improbably be called upon to take. That very day, just before the Dales had come in, he had received a second letter from his darling Amelia, written very closely upon the heels of the first. Why had he not answered her? Was he ill? Was he untrue? No; she would not believe that, and therefore fell back upon the probability of his illness. If it was so, she would rush down to see him. Nothing on earth should keep her from the bedside of her betrothed. If she did not get an answer from her beloved John by return of post, she would be down with him at Guestwick by the express train. Here was a position for such a young man as John Eames! And of Amelia Roper we may say that she was a young woman who would not give up her game, as long as the least chance remained of

her winning it. "I must go somewhere," John said to himself, as he put on his slouched hat and wandered forth through the back streets of Guestwick. What would his mother say when she heard of Amelia Roper? What would she say when she saw her?

He walked away towards the Manor, so that he might roam about the Guestwick woods in solitude. There was a path with a stile, leading off from the high road, about half a mile beyond the lodges through which the Dales had ridden up to the house, and by this path John Eames turned in, and went away till he had left the Manor house behind him, and was in the centre of the Guestwick woods. He knew the whole ground well, having roamed there ever since he was first allowed to go forth upon his walks alone. He had thought of Lily Dale by the hour together, as he had lost himself among the oak-trees; but in those former days he had thought of her with some pleasure. Now he could only think of her as of one gone from him for ever; and then he had also to think of her whom he had taken to himself in Lily's place.

Young men, very young men,—men so young that it may be almost a question whether or no they have as yet reached their manhood,—are more inclined to be earnest and thoughtful when alone than they ever are when with others, even though those others be their elders. I fancy that, as we grow old ourselves, we are apt to forget that it was so with us; and, forgetting it, we do not believe that it is so with our children. We constantly talk of the thoughtlessness of youth. I do not know whether we might not more appropriately speak of its thoughtfulness. It is, however, no doubt true that thought will not at once produce wisdom. It may almost be a question whether such wisdom as many of us have in our mature years has not come from the dying out of the power of temptation, rather than as the results of thought and resolution. Men, full fledged and at their work, are,

for the most part, too busy for much thought; but lads, on whom the work of the world has not yet fallen with all its pressure,—they have time for thinking.

And thus John Eames was thoughtful. They who knew him best accounted him to be a gay, good-hearted, somewhat reckless young man, open to temptation, but also open to good impressions; as to whom no great success could be predicated, but of whom his friends might fairly hope that he might so live as to bring upon them no disgrace and not much trouble. But, above all things, they would have called him thoughtless. In so calling him, they judged him wrong. He was ever thinking,—thinking much of the world as it appeared to him, and of himself as he appeared to the world; and thinking, also of things beyond the world. What was to be his fate here and hereafter? Lily Dale was gone from him, and Amelia Roper was hanging round his neck like a millstone! What, under such circumstances, was to be his fate here and hereafter?

We may say that the difficulties in his way were not as yet very great. As to Lily, indeed, he had no room for hope; but, then, his love for Lily had, perhaps, been a sentiment rather than a passion. Most young men have to go through that disappointment, and are enabled to bear it without much injury to their prospects or happiness. And in after-life the remembrance of such love is a blessing rather than a curse, enabling the possessor of it to feel that in those early days there was something within him of which he had no cause to be ashamed. I do not pity John Eames much in regard to Lily Dale. And then, as to Amelia Roper,—had he achieved but a tithe of that lady's experience in the world, or possessed a quarter of her audacity, surely such a difficulty as that need not have stood much in his way! What could Amelia do to him if he fairly told her that he was not minded to marry her? In very truth he had never promised to do so. He was in no way bound

to her, not even by honour. Honour, indeed, with such as her! But men are cowards before women until they become tyrants; and are easy dupes, till of a sudden they recognize the fact that it is pleasanter to be the victimizer than the victim,—and as easy. There are men, indeed, who never learn the latter lesson.

But, though the cause for fear was so slight, poor John Eames was thoroughly afraid. Little things which, in connection with so deep a sorrow as his, it is almost ridiculous to mention, added to his embarrassments, and made an escape from them seem to him to be impossible. He could not return to London without going to Burton Crescent, because his clothes were there, and because he owed to Mrs. Roper some small sum of money which on his return to London he would not have immediately in his pocket. He must therefore meet Amelia, and he knew that he had not the courage to tell a girl, face to face, that he did not love her, after he had once been induced to say that he did do so. His boldest conception did not go beyond the writing of a letter in which he would renounce her, and removing himself altogether from that quarter of the town in which Burton Crescent was situated. But then about his clothes, and that debt of his? And what if Amelia should in the meantime come down to Guestwick and claim him? Could he in his mother's presence declare that she had no right to make such a claim? The difficulties, in truth, were not very great, but they were too heavy for that poor young clerk from the Income-tax Office.

You will declare that he must have been a fool and a coward. Yet he could read and understand Shakespeare. He knew much,—by far too much,—of Byron's poetry by heart. He was a deep critic, often writing down his criticisms in a lengthy journal which he kept. He could write quickly, and with understanding; and I may declare that men at his office had already ascertained that he was no fool. He knew

his business, and could do it,—as many men failed to do who were much less foolish before the world. And as to that matter of cowardice, he would have thought it the greatest blessing in the world to be shut up in a room with Crosbie, having permission to fight with him till one of them should have been brought by stress of battle to give up his claim to Lily Dale. Eames was no coward. He feared no man on earth. But he was terribly afraid of Amelia Roper.

He wandered about through the old Manor woods very ill at ease. The post from Guestwick went out at seven, and he must at once make up his mind whether or no he would write to Amelia on that day. He must also make up his mind as to what he would say to her. He felt that he should at least answer her letter, let his answer be what it might. Should he promise to marry her,—say, in ten or twelve years' time? Should he tell her that he was a blighted being, unfit for love, and with humility entreat of her that he might be excused? Or should he write to her mother, telling her that Burton Crescent would not suit him any longer, promising her to send the balance on receipt of his next payment, and asking her to send his clothes in a bundle to the Income-tax Office? Or should he go home to his own mother, and boldly tell it all to her?

He at last resolved that he must write the letter, and as he composed it in his mind he sat himself down beneath an old tree which stood on a spot at which many of the forest tracks met and crossed each other. The letter, as he framed it here, was not a bad letter, if only he could have got it written and posted. Every word of it he chose with precision, and in his mind he emphasized every expression which told his mind clearly and justified his purpose. "He acknowledged himself to have been wrong in misleading his correspondent, and allowing her to imagine that she possessed his heart. He had not a heart at her disposal. He had been weak not to write to her before, having been deterred from doing

so by the fear of giving her pain; but now he felt that he was bound in honour to tell her the truth. Having so told her, he would not return to Burton Crescent, if it would pain her to see him there. He would always have a deep regard for her,"—Oh, Johnny!—"and would hope anxiously that her welfare in life might be complete." That was the letter, as he wrote it on the tablets of his mind under the tree; but the getting it put on to paper was a task, as he knew, of greater difficulty. Then, as he repeated it to himself, he fell asleep.

"Young man," said a voice in his ears as he slept. At first the voice spoke as a voice from his dream without waking him, but when it was repeated, he sat up and saw that a stout gentleman was standing over him. For a moment he did not know where he was, or how he had come there; nor could he recollect, as he saw the trees about him, how long he had been in the wood. But he knew the stout gentleman well enough, though he had not seen him for more than two years. "Young man," said the voice, "if you want to catch rheumatism, that's the way to do it. Why, it's young Eames, isn't it?"

"Yes, my lord," said Johnny, raising himself up so that he was now sitting, instead of lying, as he looked up into the earl's rosy face.

"I knew your father, and a very good man he was; only he shouldn't have taken to farming. People think they can farm without learning the trade, but that's a very great mistake. I can farm, because I've learned it. Don't you think you'd better get up?" Whereupon Johnny raised himself to his feet. "Not but what you're very welcome to lie there if you like it. Only, in October, you know——"

"I'm afraid I'm trespassing, my lord," said Eames. "I came in off the path, and——"

"You're welcome; you're very welcome. If you'll come up to the house, I'll give you some luncheon." This hospitable offer, however, Johnny declined, alleg-

ing that it was late, and that he was going home to dinner.

"Come along," said the earl. "You can't go any shorter way than by the house. Dear, dear, how well I remember your father. He was a much cleverer man than I am,—very much; but he didn't know how to send a beast to market any better than a child. By-the-by, they have put you into a public office, haven't they?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And a very good thing, too,—a very good thing, indeed. But why were you asleep in the wood? It isn't warm, you know. I call it rather cold." And the earl stopped, and looked at him, scrutinising him, as though resolved to inquire into so deep a mystery.

"I was taking a walk, and thinking of something, I sat down."

"Leave of absence, I suppose?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Have you got into trouble? You look as though you were in trouble. Your poor father used to be in trouble."

"I haven't taken to farming," said Johnny, with an attempt at a smile.

"Ha, ha, ha,—quite right. No, don't take to farming. Unless you learn it, you know, you might just as well take to shoemaking;—just the same. You haven't got into trouble, then; eh?"

"No, my lord, not particularly."

"Not particularly. I know very well that young men do get into trouble when they get up to London. If you want any—any advice, or that sort of thing, you may come to me; for I knew your father well. Do you like shooting?"

"I never did shoot anything."

"Well, perhaps better not. To tell the truth, I'm not very fond of young men who take to shooting without having anything to shoot at. By-the-by, now I think of it, I'll send your mother some game." It may, however, here be fair to mention that game very

often came from Guestwick Manor to Mrs. Eames. "And look here, cold pheasant for breakfast is the best thing I know of. Pheasants at dinner are rubbish,—mere rubbish. Here we are at the house. Will you come in and have a glass of wine?"

But this John Eames declined, pleasing the earl better by doing so than he would have done by accepting it. Not that the lord was inhospitable or insincere in his offer, but he preferred that such a one as John Eames should receive his proffered familiarity without too much immediate assurance. He felt that Eames was a little in awe of his companion's rank, and he liked him the better for it. He liked him the better for it, and was a man apt to remember his likings. "If you won't come in, good-by," and he gave Johnny his hand.

"Good evening, my lord," said Johnny.

"And remember this; it is the deuce of a thing to have rheumatism in your loins. I wouldn't go to sleep under a tree, if I were you,—not in October. But you're always welcome to go anywhere about the place."

"Thank you, my lord."

"And if you should take to shooting,—but I dare say you won't; and if you come to trouble, and want advice, or that sort of thing, write to me. I knew your father well." And so they parted, Eames returning on his road towards Guestwick.

For some reason, which he could not define, he felt better after his interview with the earl. There had been something about the fat, good-natured, sensible old man, which had cheered him, in spite of his sorrow. "Pheasants for dinner are rubbish,—mere rubbish," he said to himself, over and over again, as he went along the road; and they were the first words which he spoke to his mother, after entering the house.

"I wish we had some of that sort of rubbish," said she.

"So you will, to-morrow;" and then he described to her his interview.

"The earl was, at any rate, quite right about lying upon the ground. I wonder you can be so foolish. And he is right about your poor father too. But you have got to change your boots; and we shall be ready for dinner almost immediately."

But Johnny Eames, before he sat down to dinner, did write his letter to Amelia, and did go out to post it with his own hands,—much to his mother's annoyance. But the letter would not get itself written in that strong and appropriate language which had come to him as he was roaming through the woods. It was a bald letter, and somewhat cowardly withal.

DEAR AMELIA (the letter ran),—I have received both of yours; and did not answer the first because I felt that there was a difficulty in expressing what I wish to say; and now it will be better that you should allow the subject to stand over till I am back in town. I shall be there in ten days from this. I have been quite well, and am so; but of course am much obliged by your inquiries. I know you will think this very cold; but when I tell you everything, you will agree with me that it is best. If I were to marry, I know that we should be unhappy, because we should have nothing to live on. If I have ever said anything to deceive you, I beg your pardon with all my heart;—but perhaps it will be better to let the subject remain till we shall meet again in London.

Believe me to be

Your most sincere friend,

And I may say admirer,—[Oh, John Eames!]

JOHN EAMES.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST DAY

LAST days are wretched days; and so are last moments wretched moments. It is not the fact that the parting is coming which makes these days and moments so wretched, but the feeling that some-

thing special is expected from them, which something they always fail to produce. Spasmodic periods of pleasure, of affection, or even of study, seldom fail of disappointment when premeditated. When last days are coming, they should be allowed to come and to glide away without special notice or mention. And as for last moments, there should be none such. Let them ever be ended, even before their presence has been acknowledged.

But Lily Dale had not yet been taught these lessons by her world's experience, and she expected that this sweetest cup of which she had ever drank should go on being sweet—sweeter and still sweeter—as long as she could press it to her lips. How the dregs had come to mix themselves with the last drops we have already seen; and on that same day—on the Monday evening—the bitter task still remained; for Crosbie, as they walked about through the gardens in the evening, found other subjects on which he thought it necessary to give her sundry hints, intended for her edification, which came to her with much of the savour of a lecture. A girl, when she is thoroughly in love, as surely was the case with Lily, likes to receive hints as to her future life from the man to whom she is devoted; but she would, I think, prefer that such hints should be short, and that the lesson should be implied rather than declared;—that they should, in fact, be hints and not lectures. Crosbie, who was a man of tact, who understood the world and had been dealing with women for many years, no doubt understood all this as well as we do. But he had come to entertain a notion that he was an injured man, that he was giving very much more than was to be given to him, and that therefore he was entitled to take liberties which might not fairly be within the reach of another lover. My reader will say that in all this he was ungenerous. Well; he was ungenerous. I do not know that I have ever said that much generosity was to be expected from him. He had some principles of right and wrong under the guidance of which it may perhaps

be hoped that he will not go utterly astray; but his past life had not been of a nature to make him unselfish. He was ungenerous, and Lily felt it, though she would not acknowledge it even to herself. She had been very open with him,—acknowledging the depth of her love for him; telling him that he was now all in all to her; that life without his love would be impossible to her: and in a certain way he took advantage of these strong avowals, treating her as though she were a creature utterly in his power;—as indeed she was.

On that evening he said no more of Johnny Eames, but said much of the difficulty of a man establishing himself with a wife in London, who had nothing but his own moderate income on which to rely. He did not in so many words tell her that if her friends could make up for her two or three thousand pounds,—that being much less than he had expected when he first made his offer,—this terrible difficulty would be removed; but he said enough to make her understand that the world would call him very imprudent in taking a girl who had nothing. And as he spoke of these things, Lily remaining for the most part silent as he did so, it occurred to him that he might talk to her freely of his past life,—more freely than he would have done had he feared that he might lose her by any such disclosures. He had no fear of losing her. Alas! might it not be possible that he had some such hope!

He told her that his past life had been expensive; that, though he was not in debt, he had lived up to every shilling that he had, and that he had contracted habits of expenditure which it would be almost impossible for him to lay aside at a day's notice. Then he spoke of entanglements, meaning, as he did so, to explain more fully what were their nature,—but not daring to do so when he found that Lily was altogether in the dark as to what he meant. No; he was not a generous man,—a very ungenerous man. And yet, during all this time, he thought that he was

guided by principle. "It will be best that I should be honest with her," he said to himself. And then he told himself, scores of times, that when making his offer he had expected, and had a right to expect, that she would not be penniless. Under those circumstances he had done the best he could for her—offering her his heart honestly, with a quick readiness to make her his own at the earliest day that she might think possible. Had he been more cautious, he need not have fallen into this cruel mistake; but she, at any rate, could not quarrel with him for his imprudence. And still he was determined to stand by his engagement and willing to marry her, although, as he the more thought of it, he felt the more strongly that he would thereby ruin his prospects, and thrust beyond his own reach all those good things which he had hoped to win. As he continued to talk to her he gave himself special credit for his generosity, and felt that he was only doing his duty by her in pointing out to her all the difficulties which lay in the way of their marriage.

At first Lily said some words intended to convey an assurance that she would be the most economical wife that man ever had, but she soon ceased from such promises as these. Her perceptions were keen, and she discovered that the difficulties of which he was afraid were those which he must overcome before his marriage, not any which might be expected to overwhelm him after it. "A cheap and nasty ménage would be my aversion," he said to her. "It is that which I want to avoid,—chiefly for your sake." Then she promised him that she would wait patiently for his time—"even though it should be for seven years," she said, looking up into his face and trying to find there some sign of approbation. "That's nonsense," he said. "People are not patriarchs now-a-days. I suppose we shall have to wait two years. And that's a deuce of a bore,—a terrible bore." And there was that in the tone of his voice which grated on her feelings, and made her wretched for the moment.

As he parted with her for the night on her own side of the little bridge which led from one garden to the other, he put his arm round her to embrace her and kiss her, as he had often done at that spot. It had become a habit with them to say their evening farewells there, and the secluded little nook amongst the shrubs was inexpressibly dear to Lily. But on the present occasion she made an effort to avoid his caress. She turned from him—very slightly, but it was enough, and he felt it. "Are you angry with me?" he said. "Oh, no! Adolphus; how can I be angry with you?" And then she turned to him and gave him her face to kiss almost before he had again asked for it. "He shall not at any rate think that I am unkind to him,—and it will not matter now," she said to herself, as she walked slowly across the lawn, in the dark, up to her mother's drawing-room window.

"Well, dearest," said Mrs. Dale, who was there alone; did the beards wag merry in the Great Hall this evening?" That was a joke with them, for neither Crosbie nor Bernard Dale used a razor at his toilet.

"Not specially merry. And I think it was my fault, for I have a headache. Mamma, I believe I will go at once to bed."

"My darling, is there anything wrong?"

"Nothing, mamma. But we had such a long ride; and then Adolphus is going, and of course we have so much to say. To-morrow will be the last day, for I shall only just see him on Wednesday morning; and as I want to be well, if possible, I'll go to bed." And so she took her candle and went.

When Bell came up, Lily was still awake, but she begged her sister not to disturb her. "Don't talk to me, Bell," she said. "I'm trying to make myself quiet, and I half feel that I should get childish if I went on talking. I have almost more to think of than I know how to manage." And she strove, not altogether unsuccessfully, to speak with a cheery tone,

as though the cares which weighed upon her were not unpleasant in their nature. Then her sister kissed her and left her to her thoughts.

And she had great matter for thinking; so great, that many hours sounded in her ears from the clock on the stairs before she brought her thoughts to a shape that satisfied herself. She did so bring them at last, and then she slept. She did so bring them, toiling over her work with tears that made her pillow wet, with heart-burning and almost with heart-breaking, with much doubting, and many anxious, eager inquiries within her own bosom as to that which she ought to do, and that which she could endure to do. But at last her resolve was taken, and then she slept.

It had been agreed between them that Crosbie should come down to the Small House on the next day after breakfast, and remain there till the time came for riding. But Lily determined to alter this arrangement, and accordingly put on her hat immediately after breakfast, and posted herself at the bridge so as to intercept her lover as he came. He soon appeared with his friend Dale, and she at once told him her purpose.

"I want to have a talk with you, Adolphus, before you go in to mamma; so come with me into the field."

"All right," said he.

"And Bernard can finish his cigar on the lawn. Mamma and Bell will join him there."

"All right," said Bernard. So they separated; and Crosbie went away with Lily into the field where they had first learned to know each other in those hay-making days.

She did not say much till they were well away from the house; but answered what words he chose to speak,—not knowing very well of what he spoke. But when she considered that they had reached the proper spot, she began very abruptly.

"Adolphus," she said, "I have something to say to you,—something to which you must listen very care-

fully." Then he looked at her, and at once knew that she was in earnest.

"This is the last day on which I could say it," she continued; "and I am very glad that I have not let the last day go by without saying it. I should not have known how to put it in a letter."

"What is it, Lily?"

"And I do not know that I can say it properly; but I hope that you will not be hard upon me. Adolphus, if you wish that all this between us should be over, I will consent."

"Lily!"

"I mean what I say. If you wish it, I will consent; and when I have said so, proposing it myself, you may be quite sure that I shall never blame you, if you take me at my word."

"Are you tired of me, Lily?"

"No. I shall never be tired of you,—never weary with loving you. I do not wish to say so now; but I will answer your question boldly. Tired of you! I fancy that a girl can never grow tired of her lover. But I would sooner die in the struggle than be the cause of your ruin. It would be better,—in every way better."

"I have said nothing of being ruined."

"But listen to me. I should not die if you left me,—not be utterly broken-hearted. Nothing on earth can I ever love as I have loved you. But I have a God and a Saviour that will be enough for me. I can turn to them with content, if it be well that you should leave me. I have gone to them, and——" But at this moment she could utter no more words. She had broken down in her effort, losing her voice through the strength of her emotion. As she did not choose that he should see her overcome, she turned from him and walked away across the grass.

Of course he followed her; but he was not so quick after her, but that time had been given to her to recover herself. "It is true," she said. "I have the strength of which I tell you. Though I have

given myself to you as your wife, I can bear to be divorced from you now,—now. And, my love, though it may sound heartless, I would sooner be so divorced from you, than cling to you as a log that must drag you down under the water, and drown you in trouble and care. I would;—indeed I would. If you go, of course that kind of thing is over for me. But the world has more than that,—much more; and I would make myself happy;—yes, my love, I would be happy. You need not fear that."

"But, Lily, why is all this said to me here to-day?"

"Because it is my duty to say it. I understand all your position now, though it is only now. It never flashed on me till yesterday. When you proposed to me, you thought that I,—that I had some fortune."

"Never mind that now, Lily."

"But you did. I see it all now. I ought perhaps to have told you that it was not so. There has been the mistake, and we are both sufferers. But we need not make the suffering deeper than needs be. My love, you are free,—from this moment. And even my heart shall not blame you for accepting your freedom."

"And are you afraid of poverty?" he asked her.

"I am afraid of poverty for you. You and I have lived differently. Luxuries, of which I know nothing, have been your daily comforts. I tell you I can bear to part with you, but I cannot bear to become the source of your unhappiness. Yes; I will bear it; and none shall dare in my hearing to speak against you. I have brought you here to say the word; nay, more than that,—to advise you to say it."

He stood silent for a moment, during which he held her by the hand. She was looking into his face, but he was looking away into the clouds; striving to appear as though he was the master of the occasion. But during those moments his mind was wracked with doubt. What if he should take her at her word? Some few would say bitter things against him, but such bitter things had been said against many another man without harming him. Would it not be well for both

if he should take her at her word? She would recover and love again, as other girls had done; and as for him, he would thus escape from the ruin at which he had been gazing for the last week past. For it was ruin,—utter ruin. He did love her; so he declared to himself. But was he a man who ought to throw the world away for love? Such men there were; but was he one of them? Could he be happy in that small house, somewhere near the New Road, with five children and horrid misgivings as to the baker's bill? Of all men living, was not he the last that should have allowed himself to fall into such a trap? All this passed through his mind as he turned his face up to the clouds with a look that was intended to be grand and noble.

"Speak to me, Adolphus, and say that it shall be so."

Then his heart misgave him, and he lacked the courage to extricate himself from his trouble; or, as he afterwards said to himself, he had not the heart to do it. "If I understand you rightly, Lily, all this comes from no want of love on your own part?"

"Want of love on my part? But you should not ask me that."

"Until you tell me that there is such a want, I will agree to no parting." Then he took her hand and put it within his arm. "No, Lily; whatever may be our cares and troubles, we are bound together,—indissolubly."

"Are we" said she; and as she spoke, her voice trembled, and her hand shook.

"Much too firmly for any such divorce as that. No, Lily, I claim the right to tell you all my troubles; but I shall not let you go."

"But, Adolphus——" and the hand on his arm was beginning to cling to it again.

"Adolphus," said he, "has got nothing more to say on that subject. He exercises the right which he believes to be his own, and chooses to retain the prize which he has won."

She was now clinging to him in very truth. "Oh,

my love!" she said. "I do not know how to say it again. It is of you that I am thinking;—of you, of you!"

"I know you are; but you have misunderstood me a little; that's all."

"Have I? Then listen to me again, once more, my heart's own darling, my love, my husband, my lord! If I cannot be to you at once like Ruth, and never cease from coming after you, my thoughts to you shall be like those of Ruth:—if aught but death part thee and me, may God do so to me and more also." Then she fell upon his breast and wept.

He still hardly understood the depth of her character. He was not himself deep enough to comprehend it all. But yet he was awed by her great love, and exalted to a certain solemnity of feeling which for the time made him rejoice in his late decision. For a few hours he was minded to throw the world behind him, and wear this woman, as such a woman should be worn,—as a comforter to him in all things, and a strong shield against great troubles. "Lily," he said, "my own Lily!"

"Yes, your own, to take when you please, and leave untaken while you please; and as much your own in one way as in the other." Then she looked up again, and essayed to laugh as she did so. "You will think I am frantic, but I am so happy. I don't care about your going now; indeed I don't. There; you may go now, this minute, if you like it." And she withdrew her hand from him. "I feel so differently from what I have done for the last few days. I am so glad you have spoken to me as you did. Of course I ought to bear all those things with you. But I cannot be unhappy about it now. I wonder if I went to work and made a lot of things, whether that would help?"

"A set of shirts for me, for instance?"

"I could do that, at any rate."

"It may come to that yet, some of these days."

"I pray God that it may." Then again she was serious, and the tears came once more into her eyes.

"I pray God that it may. To be of use to you,—to work for you,—to do something for you that may have in it some sober, earnest purport of usefulness;—that is what I want above all things. I want to be with you at once that I may be of service to you. Would that you and I were alone together, that I might do everything for you. I sometimes think that a very poor man's wife is the happiest, because she does do everything."

"You shall do everything very soon," said he; and then they sauntered along pleasantly through the morning hours, and when they again appeared at Mrs. Dale's table, Mrs. Dale and Bell were astonished at Lily's brightness. All her old ways had seemed to return to her, and she made her little saucy speeches to Mr. Crosbie as she had used to do when he was first becoming fascinated by her sweetness. "You know that you'll be such a swell when you get to that countess's house that you'll forget all about Allington."

"Of course I shall," said he.

"And the paper you write upon will be all over coronets,—that is, if ever you do write. Perhaps you will to Bernard some day, just to show that you are staying at a castle."

"You certainly don't deserve that he should write to you," said Mrs. Dale.

"I don't expect it for a moment,—not till he gets back to London and finds that he has nothing else to do at his office. But I should so like to see how you and Lady Julia get on together. It was quite clear that she regarded you as an ogre; didn't she, Bell?"

"So many people are ogres to Lady Julia," said Bell.

"I believe Lady Julia to be a very good woman," said Mrs. Dale, "and I won't have her abused."

"Particularly before poor Bernard, who is her pet nephew," said Lily. "I dare say Adolphus will become a pet too when she has been a week with him at Courcy Castle. Do try and cut Bernard out."

From all which Mrs. Dale learned that some care

which had sat heavy on Lily's heart was now lightened, if not altogether removed. She had asked no questions of her daughter, but she had perceived during the past few days that Lily was in trouble, and she knew that such trouble had arisen from her engagement. She had asked no questions, but of course she had been told what was Mr. Crosbie's income, and had been made to understand that it was not to be considered as amply sufficient for all the wants of matrimony. There was little difficulty in guessing what was the source of Lily's care, and as little in now perceiving that something had been said between them by which that care had been relieved.

After that they all rode, and the afternoon went by pleasantly. It was the last day indeed, but Lily had determined that she would not be sad. She had told him that he might go now, and that she would not be discontented at his going. She knew that the morrow would be very blank to her; but she struggled to live up to the spirit of her promise, and she succeeded. They all dined at the Great House, even Mrs. Dale doing so upon this occasion. When they had come in from the garden in the evening, Crosbie talked more to Mrs. Dale than he did even to Lily, while Lily sat a little distant, listening with all her ears, sometimes saying a low-toned word, and happy beyond expression in the feeling that her mother and her lover should understand each other. And it must be understood that Crosbie at this time was fully determined to conquer the difficulties of which he had thought so much, and to fix the earliest day which might be possible for his marriage. The solemnity of that meeting in the field still hung about him, and gave to his present feelings a manliness and a truth of purpose which were too generally wanting to them. If only those feelings would last! But now he talked to Mrs. Dale about her daughter, and about their future prospects, in a tone which he could not have used had not his mind for the time been true to her. He had never spoken so freely to Lily's mother, and at no time had

Mrs. Dale felt for him so much of a mother's love. He apologized for the necessity of some delay, arguing that he could not endure to see his young wife without the comfort of a home of her own, and that he was now, as he always had been, afraid of incurring debt. Mrs. Dale disliked waiting engagements,—as do all mothers,—but she could not answer unkindly to such pleading as this.

"Lily is so very young," she said, "that she may well wait for a year or so."

"For seven years," said Lily, jumping up and whispering into her mother's ear. "I shall hardly be six-and-twenty then, which is not at all too old."

And so the evening passed away very pleasantly.

"God bless you, Adolphus!" Mrs. Dale said to him, as she parted with him at her own door. It was the first time that she had called him by his Christian name. "I hope you understand how much we are trusting to you."

"I do,—I do," said he, as he pressed her hand. Then as he walked back alone, he swore to himself, binding himself to the oath with all his heart, that he would be true to those women,—both to the daughter and to the mother; for the solemnity of the morning was still upon him.

He was to start the next morning before eight, Bernard having undertaken to drive him over to the railway at Guestwick. The breakfast was on the table shortly after seven; and just as the two men had come down, Lily entered the room, with her hat and shawl. "I said I would be in to pour out your tea," said she; and then she sat herself down over against the teapot.

It was a silent meal, for people do not know what to say in those last minutes. And Bernard, too, was there; proving how true is the adage which says, that two are company, but that three are not. I think that Lily was wrong to come up on that last morning; but she would not hear of letting him start without seeing him, when her lover had begged her not to

put herself to so much trouble. Trouble! Would she not have sat up all night to see even the last of the top of his hat?

Then Bernard, muttering something about the horse, went away. "I have only one minute to speak to you," said she, jumping up, "and I have been thinking all night of what I had to say. It is so easy to think, and so hard to speak."

"My darling, I understand it all."

"But you must understand this, that I will never distrust you. I will never ask you to give me up again, or say that I could be happy without you. I could not live without you; that is, without the knowledge that you are mine. But I will never be impatient, never. Pray, pray believe me! Nothing shall make me distrust you."

"Dearest Lily, I will endeavour to give you no cause."

"I know you will not; but I specially wanted to tell you that. And you will write,—very soon?"

"Directly I get there."

"And as often as you can. But I won't bother you; only your letters will make me so happy. I shall be so proud when they come to me. I shall be afraid of writing too much to you, for fear I should tire you."

"You will never do that."

"Shall I not? But you must write first, you know. If you could only understand how I shall live upon your letters! And now good-by. There are the wheels. God bless you, my own, my own!" And she gave herself up into his arms, as she had given herself up into his heart.

She stood at the door as the two men got into the gig, and, as it passed down through the gate, she hurried out upon the terrace, from whence she could see it for a few yards down the lane. Then she ran from the terrace to the gate, and, hurrying through the gate, made her way into the churchyard, from the farther corner of which she could see the heads of the

two men till they had made the turn into the main road beyond the parsonage. There she remained till the very sound of the wheels no longer reached her ears, stretching her eyes in the direction they had taken. Then she turned round slowly and made her way out at the churchyard gate, which opened on to the road close to the front door of the Small House.

"I should like to punch his head," said Hopkins, the gardener, to himself, as he saw the gig driven away and saw Lily trip after it, that she might see the last of him whom it carried. "And I wouldn't think nothing of doing it; no more I wouldn't," Hopkins added in his soliloquy. It was generally thought about the place that Miss Lily was Hopkins's favourite; though he showed it chiefly by snubbing her more frequently than he snubbed her sister.

Lily had evidently intended to return home through the front door; but she changed her purpose before she reached the house, and made her way slowly back through the churchyard, and by the gate of the Great House, and by the garden at the back of it, till she crossed the little bridge. But on the bridge she rested awhile, leaning against the railing as she had often leant with him, and thinking of all that had passed since that July day on which she had first met him. On no spot had he so often told her of his love as on this, and nowhere had she so eagerly sworn to him that she would be his own dutiful loving wife.

"And by God's help so I will," she said to herself, as she walked firmly up to the house. "He has gone, mamma," she said, as she entered the breakfast-room. "And now we'll go back to our work-a-day ways; it has been all Sunday for me for the last six weeks."

CHAPTER XVI

MR. CROSBIE MEETS AN OLD CLERGYMAN ON HIS WAY TO COURCY CASTLE

For the first mile or two of their journey Crosbie and Bernard Dale sat, for the most part, silent in their gig. Lily, as she ran down to the churchyard corner and stood there looking after them with her loving eyes, had not been seen by them. But the spirit of her devotion was still strong upon them both, and they felt that it would not be well to strike at once into any ordinary topic of conversation. And, moreover, we may presume that Crosbie did feel much at thus parting from such a girl as Lily Dale, with whom he had lived in close intercourse for the last six weeks, and whom he loved with all his heart,—with all the heart that he had for such purposes. In those doubts as to his marriage which had troubled him he had never expressed to himself any disapproval of Lily. He had not taught himself to think that she was other than he would have her be, that he might thus give himself an excuse for parting from her. Not as yet, at any rate, had he had recourse to that practice, so common with men who wish to free themselves from the bonds with which they have permitted themselves to be bound. Lily had been too sweet to his eyes, to his touch, to all his senses for that. He had enjoyed too keenly the pleasure of being with her, and of hearing her tell him that she loved him, to allow of his being personally tired of her. He had not been so spoilt by his club life but that he had taken exquisite pleasure in all her nice country ways, and soft, kind-hearted, womanly humour. He was by no means tired of Lily. Better than any of his London pleasures was this pleasure of making love in the green fields to Lily Dale. It was the consequences of it that affrighted him. Babies with

their belongings would come; and dull evenings, over a dull fire, or else the pining grief of a disappointed woman. He would be driven to be careful as to his clothes, because the ordering of a new coat would entail a serious expenditure. He could go no more among countesses and their daughters, because it would be out of the question that his wife should visit at their houses. All the victories that he had ever won must be given up. He was thinking of this even while the gig was going round the corner near the parsonage house, and while Lily's eyes were still blessed with some view of his departing back; but he was thinking, also, that moment, that there might be other victory in store for him; that it might be possible for him to learn to like that fireside, even though babies should be there, and a woman opposite to him intent on baby cares. He was struggling as best he knew how; for the solemnity which Lily had imparted to him had not yet vanished from his spirit.

"I hope that, upon the whole, you feel contented with your visit?" said Bernard to him, at last.

"Contented? Of course I do."

"That is easily said; and civility to me, perhaps, demands as much. But I know that you have, to some extent, been disappointed."

"Well; yes. I have been disappointed as regards money. It is of no use denying it."

"I should not mention it now, only that I want to know that you exonerate me."

"I have never blamed you;—neither you, nor anybody else; unless, indeed, it has been myself."

"You mean that you regret what you've done?"

"No; I don't mean that. I am too devotedly attached to that dear girl whom we have just left to feel any regret that I have engaged myself to her. But I do think that had I managed better with your uncle things might have been different."

"I doubt it. Indeed I know that it is not so; and can assure you that you need not make yourself unhappy on that score. I had thought, as you well

know, that he would have done something for Lily;—something, though not as much as he always intended to do for Bell. But you may be sure of this; that he had made up his mind as to what he would do. Nothing that you or I could have said would have changed him."

"Well; we won't say anything more about it," said Crosbie.

Then they went on again in silence, and arrived at Guestwick in ample time for the train.

"Let me know as soon as you get to town," said Crosbie.

"Oh, of course. I'll write to you before that."

And so they parted. As Dale turned and went, Crosbie felt that he liked him less than he had done before; and Bernard, also, as he was driving him, came to the conclusion that Crosbie would not be so good a fellow as a brother-in law as he had been as a chance friend. He'll give us trouble, in some way; and I'm sorry that I brought him down." That was Dale's inward conviction in the matter.

Crosbie's way from Guestwick lay, by railway, to Barchester, the cathedral city, lying in the next county, from whence he purposed to have himself conveyed over to Courcy. There had, in truth, been no cause for his very early departure, as he was aware that all arrivals at country houses should take place at some hour not much previous to dinner. He had been determined to be so soon upon the road by a feeling that it would be well for him to get over those last hours. Thus he found himself in Barchester at eleven o'clock, with nothing on his hands to do; and, having nothing else to do, he went to church. There was a full service at the cathedral, and as the verger marshalled him up to one of the empty stalls, a little spare old man was beginning to chant the Litany. "I did not mean to fall in for all this," said Crosbie, to himself, as he settled himself with his arms on the cushion. But the peculiar charm of that old man's voice soon attracted him;—a voice that, though

tremulous, was yet strong; and he ceased to regret the saint whose honour and glory had occasioned the length of that day's special service.

"And who is the old gentleman who chanted the Litany?" he asked the verger afterwards, as he allowed himself to be shown round the monuments of the cathedral.

"That's our precentor, sir; Mr. Harding. You must have heard of Mr. Harding." But Crosbie, with a full apology, confessed his ignorance.

"Well, sir; he's pretty well known too, tho' he is so shy like. He's father-in-law to our dean, sir; and father-in-law to Archdeacon Grantly also."

"His daughters have all gone into the profession, then?"

"Why, yes; but Miss Eleanor—for I remember her before she was married at all,—when they lived at the hospital——"

"At the hospital?"

"Hiram's hospital, sir. He was warden, you know. You should go and see the hospital, sir, if you never was there before. Well, Miss Eleanor,—that was his youngest,—she married Mr. Bold as her first. But now she's the dean's lady."

"Oh; the dean's lady, is she?"

"Yes, indeed. And what do you think, sir? Mr. Harding might have been dean himself, if he'd liked. They did offer it to him."

"And he refused it?"

"Indeed he did, sir."

"Nolo decanari. I never heard of that before. What made him so modest?"

"Just that, sir; because he is modest. He's past his seventy now,—ever so much; but he's just as modest as a young girl. A deal more modest than some of them. To see him and his granddaughter together!"

"And who is his granddaughter?"

"Why, Lady Dumbello, as will be the Marchioness of Hartletop."

"I know Lady Dumbello," said Crosbie; not meaning, however, to boast to the verger of his noble acquaintance.

"Oh, do you, sir?" said the man, unconsciously touching his hat at this sign of greatness in the stranger; though in truth he had no love for her ladyship. "Perhaps you're going to be one of the party at Courcy Castle."

"Well, I believe I am."

"You'll find her ladyship there before you. She lunched with her aunt at the deanery as she went through, yesterday; finding it too much trouble to go out to her father's, at Plumstead. Her father is the archdeacon, you know. They do say,—but her ladyship is your friend!"

"No friend at all; only a very slight acquaintance. She's quite as much above my line as she is above her father's."

"Well, she is above them all. They say she would hardly as much as speak to the old gentleman."

"What, her father?"

"No, Mr. Harding; he that chanted the Litany just now. There he is, sir, coming out of the deanery."

They were now standing at the door leading out from one of the transepts, and Mr. Harding passed them as they were speaking together. He was a little, withered, shambling old man, with bent shoulders, dressed in knee-breeches and long black gaiters, which hung rather loosely about his poor old legs,—rubbing his hands one over the other as he went. And yet he walked quickly; not tottering as he walked, but with an uncertain, doubtful step. The verger, as Mr. Harding passed, put his hand to his head, and Crosbie also raised his hat. Whereupon Mr. Harding raised his, and bowed, and turned round as though he were about to speak. Crosbie felt that he had never seen a face on which traits of human kindness were more plainly written. But the old man did not speak. He turned his body half

round, and then shambled back, as though ashamed of his intention, and passed on.

"He is of that sort that they make angels of," said the verger. "But they can't make many if they want them all as good as he is. I'm much obliged to you, sir." And he pocketed the half-crown which Crosbie gave him.

"So that's Lady Dumbello's grandfather," said Crosbie, to himself, as he walked slowly round the close towards the hospital, by the path which the verger had shown him. He had no great love for Lady Dumbello, who had dared to snub him,—even him. "They may make an angel of the old gentleman," he continued to say; "but they'll never succeed in that way with the granddaughter."

He sauntered slowly on over a little bridge; and at the gate of the hospital he again came upon Mr. Harding. "I was going to venture in," said he, to look at the place. But perhaps I shall be intruding?"

"No, no; by no means," said Mr. Harding. "Pray come in. I cannot say that I am just at home here. I do not live here,—not now. But I know the ways of the place well, and can make you welcome. That's the warden's house. Perhaps we won't go in so early in the day, as the lady has a very large family. An excellent lady, and a dear friend of mine,—as is her husband."

"And he is warden, you say?"

"Yes, warden of the hospital. You see the house, sir. Very pretty, isn't it? Very pretty. To my idea it's the prettiest built house I ever saw."

"I won't go quite so far as that," said Crosbie.

"But you would if you'd lived there twelve years, as I did. I lived in that house twelve years, and I don't think there's so sweet a spot on the earth's surface. Did you ever see such turf as that?"

"Very nice indeed," said Crosbie, who began to make a comparison with Mrs. Dale's turf at the Small House, and to determine that the Allington turf was better than that of the hospital.

"I had that turf laid down myself. There were borders there when I first came, with hollyhocks, and those sort of things. The turf was an improvement."

"There's no doubt of that, I should say."

"The turf was an improvement, certainly. And I planted those shrubs, too. There isn't such a Portugal laurel as that in the county."

"Were you warden here, sir?" And Crosbie, as he asked the question, remembered that, in his very young days, he had heard of some newspaper quarrel which had taken place about Hiram's hospital at Barchester.

"Yes, sir. I was warden here for twelve years. Dear, dear, dear! If they had put any gentleman here that was not on friendly terms with me it would have made me very unhappy,—very. But, as it is, I go in and out just as I like; almost as much as I did before they—— But they didn't turn me out. There were reasons which made it best that I should resign."

"And you live at the deanery now, Mr. Harding?"

"Yes; I live at the deanery now. But I am not dean, you know. My son-in-law, Dr. Arabin, is the dean. I have another daughter married in the neighbourhood, and can truly say that my lines have fallen to me in pleasant places."

Then he took Crosbie in among the old men, into all of whose rooms he went. It was an almshouse for aged men of the city, and before Crosbie had left him Mr. Harding had explained all the circumstances of the hospital, and of the way in which he had left it. "I didn't like going, you know; I thought it would break my heart. But I could not stay when they said such things as that;—I couldn't stay. And, what is more, I should have been wrong to stay. I see it all now. But when I went out under that arch, Mr. Crosbie, leaning on my daughter's arm, I thought that my heart would have broken." And the tears even now ran down the old man's cheeks as he spoke.

It was a long story, and it need not be repeated

here. And there was no reason why it should have been told to Mr. Crosbie, other than this,—that Mr. Harding was a fond garrulous old man, who loved to indulge his mind in reminiscences of the past. But this was remarked by Crosbie; that, in telling his story, no word was said by Mr. Harding injurious to any one. And yet he had been injured,—injured very deeply. "It was all for the best," he said at last; "especially as the happiness has not been denied to me of making myself at home at the old place. I would take you into the house, which is very comfortable,—very; only it is not always convenient early in the day, where there's a large family." In hearing which Crosbie was again made to think of his own future home and limited income.

He had told the old clergyman who he was, and that he was on his way to Courcy. "Where, as I understand, I shall meet a granddaughter of yours."

"Yes, yes; she is my grandchild. She and I have got into different walks of life now, so that I don't see much of her. They tell me that she does her duty well in that sphere of life to which it has pleased God to call her."

"That depends," thought Crosbie, "on what the duties of a viscountess may be supposed to be." But he wished his new friend good-by, without saying anything further as to Lady Dumbello, and, at about six o'clock in the evening, had himself driven up under the portico of Courcy Castle.

CHAPTER XVII

COURCY CASTLE

Courcy Castle was very full. In the first place, there was a great gathering there of all the Courcy family. The earl was there,—and the countess, of course. At this period of the year Lady De Courcy was always at home; but the presence of the earl

himself had heretofore been by no means so certain. He was a man who had been much given to royal visitings and attendances, to parties in the Highlands, to—no doubt necessary—prolongations of the London season, to sojournings at certain German watering-places, convenient, probably, in order that he might study the ways and ceremonies of German Courts,—and to various other absences from home, occasioned by a close pursuit of his own special aims in life; for the Earl De Courcy had been a great courtier. But of late gout, lumbago, and perhaps also some diminution in his powers of making himself generally agreeable, had reconciled him to domestic duties, and the earl spent much of his time at home. The countess, in former days, had been heard to complain of her lord's frequent absence. But it is hard to please some women,—and now she would not always be satisfied with his presence.

And all the sons and daughters were there,—excepting Lord Porlock, the eldest, who never met his father. The earl and Lord Porlock were not on terms, and indeed hated each other as only such fathers and such sons can hate. The Honourable George De Courcy was there with his bride, he having lately performed a manifest duty, in having married a young woman with money. Very young she was not,—having reached some years of her life in advance of thirty; but then, neither was the Honourable George very young; and in this respect the two were not ill-sorted. The lady's money had not been very much,—perhaps thirty thousand pounds or so. But then the Honourable George's money had been absolutely none. Now he had an income on which he could live, and therefore his father and mother had forgiven him all his sins, and taken him again to their bosom. And the marriage was matter of great moment, for the elder scion of the house had not yet taken to himself a wife, and the De Courcy family might have to look to this union for an heir. The lady herself was not beautiful, or clever, or of

imposing manners—nor was she of high birth. But neither was she ugly, nor unbearably stupid. Her manners were, at any rate, innocent; and as to her birth,—seeing that, from the first, she was not supposed to have had any,—no disappointment was felt. Her father had been a coal-merchant. She was always called Mrs. George, and the effort made respecting her by everybody in and about the family was to treat her as though she were a figure of a woman, a large well-dressed resemblance of a being, whom it was necessary for certain purposes that the De Courcys should carry in their train. Of the Honourable George we may further observe, that, having been a spendthrift all his life, he had now become strictly parsimonious. Having reached the discreet age of forty, he had at last learned that beggary was objectionable; and he, therefore, devoted every energy of his mind to save shillings and pence wherever pence and shillings might be saved. When first this turn came upon him both his father and mother were delighted to observe it; but, although it had hardly yet lasted over twelve months, some evil results were beginning to appear. Though possessed of an income, he would take no steps towards possessing himself of a house. He hung by the paternal mansion, either in town or country; drank the paternal wines, rode the paternal horses, and had even contrived to obtain his wife's dresses from the maternal milliner. In the completion of which little last success, however, some slight family dissent had showed itself.

The Honourable John, the third son, was also at Courcy. He had as yet taken to himself no wife, and as he had not hitherto made himself conspicuously useful in any special walk of life his family were beginning to regard him as a burden. Having no income of his own to save, he had not copied his brother's virtue of parsimony; and, to tell the truth plainly, had made himself so generally troublesome to his father, that he had been on more than one occa-

sion threatened with expulsion from the family roof. But it is not easy to expel a son. Human fledglings cannot be driven out of the nest like young birds. An Honourable John turned adrift into absolute poverty will make himself heard of in the world,—if in no other way, by his ugliness as he starves. A thoroughgoing ne'er-do-well in the upper classes has eminent advantages on his side in the battle which he fights against respectability. He can't be sent to Australia against his will. He can't be sent to the poor-house without the knowledge of all the world. He can't be kept out of tradesmen's shops; nor, without terrible scandal, can he be kept away from the paternal properties. The earl had threatened, and snarled, and shown his teeth; he was an angry man, and a man who could look very angry; with eyes which could almost become red, and a brow that wrinkled itself in perpendicular wrinkles, sometimes very terrible to behold. But he was an inconstant man, and the Honourable John had learned to measure his father, and in an accurate balance.

I have mentioned the sons first, because it is to be presumed that they were the elder, seeing that their names were mentioned before those of their sisters in all the peerages. But there were four daughters,—the Ladies Amelia, Rosina, Margaretta, and Alexandrina. They, we may say, were the flowers of the family, having so lived that they had created none of those family feuds which had been so frequent between their father and their brothers. They were discreet, high-bred women, thinking, perhaps, a little too much of their own position in the world, and somewhat apt to put a wrong value on those advantages which they possessed, and on those which they did not possess. The Lady Amelia was already married, having made a substantial if not a brilliant match with Mr. Mortimer Gazebee, a flourishing solicitor, belonging to a firm which had for many years acted as agents to the De Courcy property. Mortimer Gazebee was now member of Parliament for Barchester, partly through

the influence of his father-in-law. That this should be so was a matter of great disgust to the Honourable George, who thought that the seat should have belonged to him. But as Mr. Gazebee had paid the very heavy expenses of the election out of his own pocket, and as George De Courcy certainly could not have paid them, the justice of his claim may be questionable. Mrs. Gazebee was now the happy mother of many babies, whom she was wont to carry with her on her visits to Courcy Castle, and had become an excellent partner to her husband. He would perhaps have liked it better if she had not spoken so frequently to him of her own high position as the daughter of an earl, or so frequently to others of her low position as the wife of an attorney. But, on the whole, they did very well together, and Mr. Gazebee had gotten from his marriage quite as much as he expected when he made it.

The Lady Rosina was very religious; and I do not know that she was conspicuous in any other way, unless it might be that she somewhat resembled her father in her temper. It was of the Lady Rosina that the servants were afraid, especially with reference to that so-called day of rest which, under her dominion, had become to many of them a day of restless torment. It had not always been so with the Lady Rosina; but her eyes had been opened by the wife of a great church dignitary in the neighbourhood, and she had undergone regeneration. How great may be the misery inflicted by an energetic, unmarried, healthy woman in that condition,—a woman with no husband, or children, or duties, to distract her from her work—I pray that my readers may never know.

The Lady Margaretta was her mother's favourite, and she was like her mother in all things,—except that her mother had been a beauty. The world called her proud, disdainful, and even insolent; but the world was not aware that in all that she did she was acting in accordance with a principle which had called for much self-abnegation. She had considered it her

duty to be a De Courcy and an earl's daughter at all times; and consequently she had sacrificed to her idea of duty all popularity, adulation, and such admiration as would have been awarded to her as a well-dressed, tall, fashionable, and by no means stupid young woman. To be at all times in something higher than they who were manifestly below her in rank,—that was the effort that she was ever making. But she had been a good daughter, assisting her mother, as best she might, in all family troubles, and never repining at the cold, colourless, unlovely life which had been vouchsafed to her.

Alexandrina was the beauty of the family, and was in truth the youngest. But even she was not very young, and was beginning to make her friends uneasy lest she, too, should let the precious season of hay-harvest run by without due use of her summer's sun. She had, perhaps, counted too much on her beauty, which had been beauty according to law rather than beauty according to taste, and had looked, probably, for too bounteous a harvest. That her forehead, and nose, and cheeks, and chin were well-formed, no man could deny. Her hair was soft and plentiful. Her teeth were good, and her eyes were long and oval. But the fault of her face was this,—that when you left her you could not remember it. After a first acquaintance you could meet her again and not know her. After many meetings you would fail to carry away with you any portrait of her features. But such as she had been at twenty, such was she now at thirty. Years had not robbed her face of its regularity, or ruffled the smoothness of her too even forehead. Rumour had declared that on more than one, or perhaps more than two occasions, Lady Alexandrina had been already induced to plight her troth in return for proffered love; but we all know that Rumour, when she takes to such topics, exaggerates the truth, and sets down much in malice. The lady was once engaged, the engagement lasting for two years, and the engagement had been broken off, owing

to some money difficulties between the gentlemen of the families. Since that she had become somewhat querulous, and was supposed to be uneasy on that subject of her haymaking. Her glass and her maid assured her that her sun shone still as brightly as ever; but her spirit was becoming weary with waiting, and she dreaded lest she should become a terror to all, as was her sister Rosina, or an object of interest to none, as was Margaretta. It was from her especially that this message had been sent to our friend Crosbie; for, during the last spring in London, she and Crosbie had known each other well. Yes, my gentle readers; it is true, as your heart suggests to you. Under such circumstances Mr. Crosbie should not have gone to Courcy Castle.

Such was the family circle of the De Courcys. Among their present guests I need not enumerate many. First and foremost in all respects was Lady Dumbello, of whose parentage and position a few words were said in the last chapter. She was a lady still very young, having as yet been little more than two years married. But in those two years her triumphs had been many;—so many, that in the great world her standing already equalled that of her celebrated mother-in-law, the Marchioness of Hartletop, who, for twenty years, had owned no greater potentate than herself in the realms of fashion. But Lady Dumbello was every inch as great as she; and men said, and women also, that the daughter-in-law would soon be the greater.

"I'll he hanged if I can understand how she does it," a certain noble peer had once said to Crosbie, standing at the door of Sebright's, during the latter days of the last season. "She never says anything to any one. She won't speak ten words a whole night through."

"I don't think she has an idea in her head," said Crosbie.

"Let me tell you that she must be a very clever woman," continued the noble peer. "No fool could

do as she does. Remember, she's only a parson's daughter; and as for beauty——"

"I don't admire her for one," said Crosbie.

"I don't want to run away with her, if you mean that," said the peer; "but she is handsome, no doubt. I wonder whether Dumbello likes it."

Dumbello did like it. It satisfied his ambition to be led about as the senior lacquey in his wife's train. He believed himself to be a great man because the world fought for his wife's presence; and considered himself to be distinguished even among the eldest sons of marquises, by the greatness reflected from the parson's daughter whom he had married. He had now been brought to Courcy Castle, and felt himself proud of his situation because Lady Dumbello had made considerable difficulty in according this week to the Countess De Courcy.

And Lady Julia De Guest was already there, the sister of the other old earl who lived in the next county. She had only arrived on the day before, but had been quick in spreading the news as to Crosbie's engagement. "Engaged to one of the Dales, is he?" said the Countess, with a pretty little smile, which showed plainly that the matter was one of no interest to herself. "Has she got any money?"

"Not a shilling, I should think," said the Lady Julia.

"Pretty, I suppose?" suggested the countess.

"Why, yes; she is pretty—and a nice girl. I don't know whether her mother and uncle were very wise in encouraging Mr. Crosbie. I don't hear that he has anything special to recommend him,—in the way of money I mean."

"I dare say it will come to nothing," said the countess, who liked to hear of girls being engaged and then losing their promised husbands. She did not know that she liked it, but she did; and already had pleasure in anticipating poor Lily's discomfiture. But not the less was she angry with Crosbie, feeling that he was making his way into her house under false pretences.

And Alexandrina also was angry when Lady Julia repeated the same tidings in her hearing. "I really don't think we care very much about it, Lady Julia," said she, with a little toss of her head. "That's three times we've been told of Miss Dale's good fortune."

"The Dales are related to you, I think?" said Margaretta.

"Not at all," said Lady Julia, bristling up. "The lady whom Mr. Crosbie proposes to marry is in no way connected with us. Her cousin, who is the heir to the Allington property, is my nephew by his mother." And then the subject was dropped.

Crosbie, on his arrival, was shown up into his room, told the hour of dinner, and left to his devices. He had been at the castle before, and knew the ways of the house. So he sat himself down to his table, and began a letter to Lily. But he had not proceeded far, not having as yet indeed made up his mind as to the form in which he would commence it, but was sitting idly with the pen in his hand, thinking of Lily, and thinking also how such houses as this in which he now found himself would be soon closed against him, when there came a rap at his door, and before he could answer the Honourable John entered the room.

"Well, old fellow," said the Honourable John, "how are you?"

Crosbie had been intimate with John De Courcy, but never felt for him either friendship or liking. Crosbie did not like such men as John De Courcy; but nevertheless, they called each other old fellow, poked each other's ribs, and were very intimate.

"Heard you were here," continued the Honourable John; "so I thought I would come up and look after you. Going to be married, ain't you?"

"Not that I know of," said Crosbie.

"Come, we know better than that. The women have been talking about it for the last three days. I had her name quite pat yesterday, but I've forgot it now. Hasn't got a tanner; has she?" And the Honourable John had now seated himself upon the table.

"You seem to know a great deal more about it than I do."

"It is that old woman from Guestwick who told us, then. The women will be at you at once, you'll find. If there's nothing in it, it's what I call a d—— shame. Why should they always pull a fellow to pieces in that way? They were going to marry me the other day!"

"Were they indeed, though?"

"To Harriet Twistleton. You know Harriet Twistleton? An uncommon fine girl, you know. But I wasn't going to be caught like that. I'm very fond of Harriet,—in my way, you know; but they don't catch an old bird like me with chaff."

"I condole with Miss Twistleton for what she has lost."

"I don't know about condoling. But upon my word, that getting married is a very slow thing. Have you seen George's wife?"

Crosbie declared that he had not as yet had that pleasure.

"She's here now, you know. I wouldn't have taken her, not if she'd had ten times thirty thousand pounds. By Jove, no. But he likes it well enough. Would you believe it now?—he cares for nothing on earth except money. You never saw such a fellow. But I'll tell you what, his nose will be out of joint yet, for Porlock is going to marry. I heard it from Colepepper, who almost lives with Porlock. As soon as Porlock heard that she was in the family way he immediately made up his mind to cut him out."

"That was a great sign of brotherly love," said Crosbie.

"I knew he'd do it," said John; "and so I told George before he got himself spliced. But he would go on. If he'd remained as he was for four or five years longer there would have been no danger;—for Porlock, you know, is leading the deuce of a life. I shouldn't wonder if he didn't reform now, and take to singing psalms or something of that sort."

"There's no knowing what a man may come to in this world."

"By George, no. But I'll tell you what, they'll find no change in me. If I marry it will not be with the intention of giving up life. I say, old fellow, have you got a cigar here?"

"What, to smoke up here, do you mean?"

"Yes; why not? we're ever so far from the women."

"Not whilst I am occupier of this room. Besides, it's time to dress for dinner."

"Is it? So it is, by George! But I mean to have a smoke first, I can tell you. So it's all a lie about your being engaged; eh?"

"As far as I know, it is," said Crosbie. And then his friend left him.

What was he to do at once, now, this very day, as to his engagement? He had felt sure that the report of it would be carried to Courcy by Lady Julia De Guest, but he had not settled down upon any resolution as to what he would do in consequence. It had not occurred to him that he would immediately be charged with the offence, and called upon to plead guilty or not guilty. He had never for a moment meditated any plea of not guilty, but he was aware of an aversion on his part to declare himself as engaged to Lilian Dale. It seemed that by doing so he would cut himself off at once from all pleasure at such houses as Courcy Castle; and, as he argued to himself, why should he not enjoy the little remnant of his bachelor life? As to his denying his engagement to John De Courcy,—that was nothing. Any one would understand that he would be justified in concealing a fact concerning himself from such a one as he. The denial repeated from John's mouth would amount to nothing, —even among John's own sisters. But now it was necessary that Crosbie should make up his mind as to what he would say when questioned by the ladies of the house. If he were to deny the fact to them the denial would be very serious. And, indeed, was it possible that he should make such denial with Lady Julia opposite to him?

Make such a denial! And was it the fact that he could wish to do so,—that he should think of such falsehood, and even meditate on the perpetration of such cowardice? He had held that young girl to his heart on that very morning. He had sworn to her, and had also sworn to himself, that she should have no reason for distrusting him. He had acknowledged most solemnly to himself that, whether for good or for ill, he was bound to her; and could it be that he was already calculating as to the practicability of disowning her? In doing so must he not have told himself that he was a villain? But in truth he made no such calculation. His object was to banish the subject, if it were possible to do so; to think of some answer by which he might create a doubt. It did not occur to him to tell the countess boldly that there was no truth whatever in the report, and that Miss Dale was nothing to him. But might he not skilfully laugh off the subject, even in the presence of Lady Julia? Men who were engaged did so usually, and why should not he? It was generally thought that solicitude for the lady's feelings should prevent a man from talking openly of his own engagement. Then he remembered the easy freedom with which his position had been discussed throughout the whole neighbourhood of Allington, and felt for the first time that the Dale family had been almost indelicate in their want of reticence. "I suppose it was done to tie me the faster," he said to himself, as he pulled out the ends of his cravat. "What a fool I was to come here, or indeed to go anywhere, after settling myself as I have done." And then he went down into the drawing-room.

It was almost a relief to him when he found that he was not charged with his sin at once. He himself had been so full of the subject that he had expected to be attacked at the moment of his entrance. He was, however, greeted without any allusion to the matter. The countess, in her own quiet way, shook hands with him as though she had seen him only the day before.

The earl, who was seated in his arm-chair, asked some one, out loud, who the stranger was, and then, with two fingers put forth, muttered some apology for a welcome. But Crosbie was quite up to that kind of thing. "How do, my lord?" he said, turning his face away to some one else as he spoke; and then he took no further notice of the master of the house. "Not know him, indeed!" Crippled though he was by his matrimonial bond, Crosbie felt that, at any rate as yet, he was the earl's equal in social importance. After that, he found himself in the back part of the drawing-room, away from the elder people, standing with Lady Alexandrina, with Miss Gresham, a cousin of the De Courcys, and sundry other of the younger portion of the assembled community.

"So you have Lady Dumbello here?" said Crosbie.

"Oh, yes; the dear creature!" said Lady Margaretta. "It was so good of her to come, you know."

"She positively refused the Duchess of St Bungay," said Alexandrina. "I hope you perceive how good we've been to you in getting you to meet her. People have actually asked to come."

"I am grateful; but, in truth, my gratitude has more to do with Courcy Castle and its habitual inmates, than with Lady Dumbello. Is he here?"

"Oh, yes! he's in the room somewhere. There he is, standing up by Lady Clandidlem. He always stands in that way before dinner. In the evening he sits down much after the same fashion."

Crosbie had seen him on first entering the room, and had seen every individual in it. He knew better than to omit the duty of that scrutinizing glance; but it sounded well in his line not to have observed Lord Dumbello.

"And her ladyship is not down?" said he.

"She is generally last," said Lady Margaretta.

"And yet she has always three women to dress her," said Alexandrina.

"But when finished, what a success it is!" said Crosbie.

"Indeed it is!" said Margaretta, with energy. Then the door was opened, and Lady Dumbello entered the room.

There was immediately a commotion among them all. Even the gouty old lord shuffled up out of his chair, and tried, with a grin, to look sweet and pleasant. The countess came forward, looking very sweet and pleasant, making little complimentary speeches, to which the viscountess answered simply by a gracious smile. Lady Clandidlem, though she was very fat and heavy, left the viscount, and got up to join the group. Baron Potsneuf, a diplomatic German of great celebrity, crossed his hand upon his breast and made a low bow. The Honourable George, who had stood silent for the last quarter of an hour, suggested to her ladyship that she must have found the air rather cold; and the Ladies Margaretta and Alexandrina fluttered up with little complimentary speeches to their dear Lady Dumbello, hoping this and beseeching that, as though the "Woman in White" before them had been the dearest friend of their infancy.

She was a woman in white, being dressed in white silk, with white lace over it, and with no other jewels upon her person than diamonds. Very beautifully she was dressed; doing infinite credit, no doubt, to those three artists who had, between them, succeeded in turning her out of hand. And her face, also, was beautiful, with a certain cold, inexpressive beauty. She walked up the room very slowly, smiling here and smiling there; but still with very faint smiles, and took the place which her hostess indicated to her. One word she said to the countess and two to the earl. Beyond that she did not open her lips. All the homage paid to her she received as though it were clearly her due. She was not in the least embarrassed, nor did she show herself to be in the slightest degree ashamed of her own silence. She did not look like a fool, nor was she even taken for a fool; but she contributed nothing to society but her cold, hard beauty, her

gait, and her dress. We may say that she contributed enough, for society acknowledged itself to be deeply indebted to her.

The only person in the room who did not move at Lady Dumbello's entrance was her husband. But he remained unmoved from no want of enthusiasm. A spark of pleasure actually beamed in his eye as he saw the triumphant entrance of his wife. He felt that he had made a match that was becoming to him as a great nobleman, and that the world was acknowledging that he had done his duty. And yet Lady Dumbello had been simply the daughter of a country parson, of a clergyman who had reached no higher rank than that of an archdeacon. "How wonderfully well that woman has educated her," the countess said that evening in her dressing-room, to Margaretta. The woman alluded to was Mrs. Grantly, the wife of the parson and mother of Lady Dumbello.

The old earl was very cross because destiny and the table of precedence required him to take out Lady Clandidlem to dinner. He almost insulted her, as she kindly endeavoured to assist him in his infirm step rather than to lean upon him.

"Ugh!" he said, "it's a bad arrangement that makes two old people like you and me be sent out together to help each other."

"Speak for yourself," said her ladyship, with a laugh. "I, at any rate, can get about without any assistance,"—which, indeed, was true enough.

"It's well for you!" growled the earl, as he got himself into his seat.

And after that he endeavoured to solace his pain by a flirtation with Lady Dumbello on his left. The earl's smiles and the earl's teeth, when he whispered naughty little nothings to pretty young women, were phenomena at which men might marvel. Whatever those naughty nothings were on the present occasion, Lady Dumbello took them all with placidity, smiling graciously, but speaking hardly more than monosyllables.

Lady Alexandrina fell to Crosbie's lot, and he felt

gratified that it was so. It might be necessary for him, as a married man, to give up such acquaintances as the De Courcys, but he should like, if possible, to maintain a friendship with Lady Alexandrina. What a friend Lady Alexandrina would be for Lily, if any such friendship were only possible! What an advantage would such an alliance confer upon that dear little girl;—for, after all, though the dear little girl's attractions were very great, he could not but admit to himself that she wanted a something,—a way of holding herself and of speaking, which some people call style. Lily might certainly learn a great deal from Lady Alexandrina; and it was this conviction, no doubt, which made him so sedulous in pleasing that lady on the present occasion.

And she, as it seemed, was well inclined to be pleased. She said no word to him during dinner about Lily; and yet she spoke about the Dales, and about Allington, showing that she knew in what quarters he had been staying, and then she alluded to their last parties in London,—those occasions on which, as Crosbie now remembered, the intercourse between them had almost been tender. It was manifest to him that at any rate she did not wish to quarrel with him. It was manifest, also, that she had some little hesitation in speaking to him about his engagement. He did not for the moment doubt that she was aware of it. And in this way matters went on between them till the ladies left the room.

"So you're going to be married, too," said the Honourable George, by whose side Crosbie found himself seated when the ladies were gone. Crosbie was employing himself upon a walnut, and did not find it necessary to make any answer.

"It's the best thing a fellow can do," continued George; "that is, if he has been careful to look to the main chance,—if he hasn't been caught napping, you know. It doesn't do for a man to go hanging on by nothing till he finds himself an old man."

"You've feathered your own nest, at any rate."

"Yes; I've got something in the scramble, and I mean to keep it. Where will John be when the governor goes off the hooks? Porlock wouldn't give him a bit of bread and cheese and a glass of beer to save his life;—that is to say, not if he wanted it."

"I'm told your elder brother is going to be married."

"You've heard that from John. He's spreading that about everywhere to take a rise out of me. I don't believe a word of it. Porlock never was a marrying man;—and, what's more, from all I hear, I don't think he'll live long."

In this way Crosbie escaped from his own difficulty; and when he rose from the dinner-table had not as yet been driven to confess anything to his own discredit.

But the evening was not yet over. When he returned to the drawing-room he endeavoured to avoid any conversation with the countess herself, believing that the attack would more probably come from her than from her daughter. He, therefore, got into conversation first with one and then with another of the girls, till at last he found himself again alone with Alexandrina.

"Mr. Crosbie," she said, in a low voice, as they were standing together over one of the distant tables, with their backs to the rest of the company, "I want you to tell me something about Miss Lilian Dale."

"About Miss Lilian Dale!" he said, repeating her words.

"Is she very pretty?"

"Yes; she certainly is pretty."

"And very nice, and attractive, and clever,—and all that is delightful? Is she perfect?"

"She is very attractive," said he; "but I don't think she's perfect."

"And what are her faults?"

"That question is hardly fair, is it? Suppose any one were to ask me what were your faults, do you think I should answer the question?"

"I am quite sure you would, and make a very long list of them, too. But as to Miss Dale, you ought

to think her perfect. If a gentleman were engaged to me, I should expect him to swear before all the world that I was the very pink of perfection."

"But supposing the gentleman were not engaged to you?"

"That would be a different thing."

"I am not engaged to you," said Crosbie. "Such happiness and such honour are, I fear, very far beyond my reach. But, nevertheless, I am prepared to testify as to your perfection anywhere."

"And what would Miss Dale say?"

"Allow me to assure you that such opinions as I may choose to express of my friends will be my own opinions, and not depend on those of any one else."

"And you think, then, that you are not bound to be enslaved as yet? How many more months of such freedom are you to enjoy?"

Crosbie remained silent for a minute before he answered, and then he spoke in a serious voice. "Lady Alexandrina," said he, "I would beg from you a great favour."

"What is the favour, Mr. Crosbie?"

"I am quite in earnest. Will you be good enough, kind enough, enough my friend, not to connect my name again with that of Miss Dale while I am here?"

"Has there been a quarrel?"

"No; there has been no quarrel. I cannot explain to you now why I make this request; but to you I will explain it before I go."

"Explain it to me!"

"I have regarded you as more than an acquaintance,—as a friend. In days now past there were moments when I was almost rash enough to hope that I might have said even more than that. I confess that I had no warrant for such hopes, but I believe that I may still look on you as a friend?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Alexandrina, in a very low voice, and with a certain amount of tenderness in her tone. "I have always regarded you as a friend."

"And therefore I venture to make the request. The subject is not one on which I can speak openly, without regret, at the present moment. But to you, at least, I promise that I will explain it all before I leave Courcy."

He at any rate succeeded in mystifying Lady Alexandrina. "I don't believe he is engaged a bit," she said to Lady Amelia Gazebee that night.

"Nonsense, my dear. Lady Julia wouldn't speak of it in that certain way if she didn't know. Of course he doesn't wish to have it talked about."

"If ever he has been engaged to her, he has broken it off again," said Lady Alexandrina.

"I dare say he will, my dear, if you give him encouragement," said the married sister, with great sisterly good-nature.

CHAPTER XVIII

LILY DALE'S FIRST LOVE-LETTER

Crosbie was rather proud of himself when he went to bed. He had succeeded in baffling the charge made against him, without saying anything as to which his conscience need condemn him. So, at least, he then told himself. The impression left by what he had said would be that there had been some question of an engagement between him and Lilian Dale, but that nothing at this moment was absolutely fixed. But in the morning his conscience was not quite so clear. What would Lily think and say if she knew it all? Could he dare to tell to her, or to tell any one the real state of his mind?

As he lay in bed, knowing that an hour remained to him before he need encounter the perils of his tub, he felt that he hated Courcy Castle and its inmates. Who was there, among them all, that was comparable to Mrs. Dale and her daughters? He detested both George and John. He loathed the earl. As to the countess herself, he was perfectly indifferent, regarding

her as a woman whom it was well to know, but as one only to be known as the mistress of Courcy Castle. and a house in London. As to the daughters, he had ridiculed them all from time to time—even Alexandrina, whom he now professed to love. Perhaps in some sort of way he had a weak fondness for her; —but it was a fondness that had never touched his heart. He could measure the whole thing at its worth, —Courcy Castle with its privileges, Lady Dumbello, Lady Clandidlem, and the whole of it. He knew that he had been happier on that lawn at Allington, and more contented with himself, than ever he had been even under Lady Hartletop's splendid roof in Shropshire. Lady Dumbello was satisfied with these things, even in the inmost recesses of her soul; but he was not a male Lady Dumbello. He knew that there was something better, and that that something was within his reach.

But, nevertheless, the air of Courcy was too much for him. In arguing the matter with himself he regarded himself as one infected with a leprosy from which there could be no recovery, and who should, therefore, make his whole life suitable to the circumstances of that leprosy. It was of no use for him to tell himself that the Small House at Allington was better than Courcy Castle. Satan knew that heaven was better than hell; but he found himself to be fitter for the latter place. Crosbie ridiculed Lady Dumbello, even there among her friends, with all the cutting words that his wit could find; but, nevertheless, the privilege of staying in the same house with her was dear to him. It was the line of life into which he had fallen, and he confessed inwardly that the struggle to extricate himself would be too much for him. All that had troubled him while he was yet at Allington, but it overwhelmed him almost with dismay beneath the hangings of Courcy Castle.

Had he not better run from the place at once? He had almost acknowledged to himself that he repented his engagement with Lilian Dale, but he still was

resolved that he would fulfil it. He was bound in honour to marry "that little girl," and he looked sternly up at the drapery over his head, as he assured himself that he was a man of honour. Yes; he would sacrifice himself. As he had been induced to pledge his word, he would not go back from it. He was too much of a man for that!

But had he not been wrong to refuse the result of Lily's wisdom when she told him in the field that it would be better for them to part? He did not tell himself that he had refused her offer merely because he had not the courage to accept it on the spur of the moment. No. "He had been too good to the poor girl to take her at her word." It was thus he argued on the matter within his own breast. He had been too true to her; and now the effect would be that they would both be unhappy for life! He could not live in content with a family upon a small income. He was well aware of that. No one could be harder upon him in that matter than was he himself. But it was too late now to remedy the ill effects of an early education.

It was thus that he debated the matter as he lay in bed,—contradicting one argument by another over and over again; but still in all of them teaching himself to think that this engagement of his was a misfortune. Poor Lily! Her last words to him had conveyed an assurance that she would never distrust him. And she also, as she lay wakeful in her bed on this the first morning of his absence, thought much of their mutual vows. How true she would be to them! How she would be his wife with all her heart and spirit! It was not only that she would love him;—but in her love she would serve him to her utmost; serve him as regarded this world, and if possible as regarded the next.

"Bell," she said, "I wish you were going to be married too."

"Thank'ye dear," said Bell. "Perhaps I shall some day."

"Ah; but I'm not joking. It seems such a serious thing. And I can't expect you to talk to me about it now as you would if you were in the same position yourself. Do you think I shall make him happy?"

"Yes, I do, certainly."

"Happier than he would be with any one else that he might meet? I dare not think that. I think I could give him up to-morrow if I could see any one that would suit him better." What would Lily have said had she been made acquainted with all the fascinations of Lady Alexandrina De Courcy?

The countess was very civil to him, saying nothing about his engagement, but still talking to him a good deal about his sojourn at Allington. Crosbie was a pleasant man for ladies in a large house. Though a sportsman, he was not so keen a sportsman as to be always out with the gamekeepers. Though a politician, he did not sacrifice his mornings to the perusal of blue-books or the preparation of party tactics. Though a reading man, he did not devote himself to study. Though a horseman, he was not often to be found in the stables. He could supply conversation when it was wanted, and could take himself out of the way when his presence among the women was not needed. Between breakfast and lunch on the day following his arrival he talked a good deal to the countess, and made himself very agreeable. She continued to ridicule him gently for his prolonged stay among so primitive and rural a tribe of people as the Dales, and he bore her little sarcasm with the utmost good-humour.

"Six weeks at Allington without a move! Why, Mr. Crosbie, you must have felt yourself to be growing there."

"So I did—like an ancient tree. Indeed, I was so rooted that I could hardly get away."

"Was the house full of people all the time?"

"There was nobody there but Bernard Dale, Lady Julia's nephew."

"Quite a case of Damon and Pythias. Fancy your

going down to the shades of Allington to enjoy the uninterrupted pleasures of friendship for six weeks."

"Friendship and the partridges."

"There was nothing else, then?"

"Indeed there was. There was a widow with two very nice daughters, living, not exactly in the same house, but on the same grounds."

"Oh, indeed. That makes such a difference; doesn't it? You are not a man to bear much privation on the score of partridges, nor a great deal, I imagine, for friendship. But when you talk of pretty girls——"

"It makes a difference, doesn't it?"

"A very great difference. I think I have heard of that Mrs. Dale before. And so her girls are nice?"

"Very nice indeed."

"Play croquet, I suppose, and eat syllabubs on the lawn? But, really, didn't you get very tired of it?"

"Oh dear, no. I was happy as the day was long."

"Going about with a crook, I suppose?"

"Not exactly a live crook; but doing all that kind of thing. I learned a great deal about pigs."

"Under the guidance of Miss Dale?"

"Yes; under the guidance of Miss Dale."

"I'm sure one is very much obliged to you for tearing yourself away from such charms, and coming to such unromantic people as we are. But I fancy men always do that sort of thing once or twice in their lives,—and then they talk of their souvenirs. I suppose it won't go beyond a souvenir with you?"

This was a direct question, but still admitted of a fencing answer. "It has, at any rate, given me one," said he, "which will last me my life!"

The countess was quite contented. That Lady Julia's statement was altogether true she had never for a moment doubted. That Crosbie should become engaged to a young lady in the country, whereas he had showed signs of being in love with her daughter in London, was not at all wonderful. Nor, in her eyes, did such practice amount to any great sin. Men did so daily, and girls were prepared for their so doing.

A man in her eyes was not to be regarded as safe from attack because he was engaged. Let the young lady who took upon herself to own him have an eye to that. When she looked back on the past careers of her own flock, she had to reckon more than one such disappointment for her own daughters. Others besides Alexandrina had been so treated. Lady De Courcy had had her grand hopes respecting her girls, and after them moderate hopes, and again after them bitter disappointments. Only one had been married, and she was married to an attorney. It was not to be supposed that she would have any very high-toned feelings as to Lily's rights in this matter.

Such a man as Crosbie was certainly no great match for an earl's daughter. Such a marriage, indeed, would, one may say, be but a poor triumph. When the countess, during the last season in town, had observed how matters were going with Alexandrina, she had cautioned her child, taking her to task for her imprudence. But the child had been at this work for fourteen years, and was weary of it. Her sisters had been at the work longer, and had almost given it up in despair. Alexandrina did not tell her parent that her heart was now beyond her control, and that she had devoted herself to Crosbie for ever; but she pouted, saying that she knew very well what she was about, scolding her mother in return, and making Lady De Courcy perceive that the struggle was becoming very weary. And then there were other considerations. Mr. Crosbie had not much certainly in his own possession, but he was a man out of whom something might be made by family influence and his own standing. He was not a hopeless, ponderous man, whom no leaven could raise. He was one of whose position in society the countess and her daughters need not be ashamed. Lady De Courcy had given no expressed consent to the arrangement, but it had come to be understood between her and her daughter that the scheme was to be entertained as admissible.

Then came these tidings of the little girl down at

Allington. She felt no anger against Crosbie. To be angry on such a subject would be futile, foolish, and almost indecorous. It was a part of the game which was as natural to her as fielding is to a cricketer. One cannot have it all winnings at any game. Whether Crosbie should eventually become her own son-in-law or not it came to her naturally, as a part of her duty in life, to bowl down the stumps of that young lady at Allington. If Miss Dale knew the game well and could protect her own wicket, let her do so.

She had no doubt as to Crosbie's engagement with Lilian Dale, but she had as little as to his being ashamed of that engagement. Had he really cared for Miss Dale he would not have left her to come to Courcy Castle. Had he been really resolved to marry her, he would not have warded all questions respecting his engagement with fictitious answers. He had amused himself with Lily Dale, and it was to be hoped that the young lady had not thought very seriously about it. That was the most charitable light in which Lady De Courcy was disposed to regard the question.

It behoved Crosbie to write to Lily Dale before dinner. He had promised to do so immediately on his arrival, and he was aware that he would be regarded as being already one day beyond his promise. Lily had told him that she would live upon his letters, and it was absolutely necessary that he should furnish her with her first meal. So he betook himself to his room in sufficient time before dinner, and got out his pen, ink, and paper.

He got out his pen, ink, and paper, and then he found that his difficulties were beginning. I beg that it may be understood that Crosbie was not altogether a villain. He could not sit down and write a letter as coming from his heart, of which as he wrote it he knew the words to be false. He was an ungenerous, worldly, inconstant man, very prone to think well of himself, and to give himself credit for virtues which he did not possess; but he could not be false with premeditated cruelty to a woman he had sworn to love.

He could not write an affectionate, warm-hearted letter to Lily, without bringing himself, at any rate for the time, to feel towards her in an affectionate, warm-hearted way. Therefore he now sat himself to work, while his pen yet remained dry in his hand, to remodel his thoughts, which had been turned against Lily and Allington by the craft of Lady De Courcy. It takes some time before a man can do this. He has to struggle with himself in a very uncomfortable way, making efforts which are often unsuccessful. It is sometimes easier to lift a couple of hundredweights than to raise a few thoughts in one's mind which at other moments will come galloping in without a whistle.

He had just written the date of his letter when a little tap came at his door, and it was opened.

"I say, Crosbie," said the Honourable John, "didn't you say something yesterday about a cigar before dinner?"

"Not a word," said Crosbie, in rather an angry tone.

"Then it must have been me," said John. "But bring your case with you, and come down to the harness-room, if you won't smoke here. I've had a regular little snuggery fitted up there; and we can go in and see the fellows making up the horses."

Crosbie wished the Honourable John at the mischief.

"I have letters to write," said he. "Besides, I never smoke before dinner."

"That's nonsense. I've smoked hundreds of cigars with you before dinner. Are you going to turn curmudgeon, too, like George and the rest of them? I don't know what's coming to the world! I suppose the fact is, that little girl at Allington won't let you smoke."

"The little girl at Allington——" began Crosbie; and then he reflected that it would not be well for him to say anything to his present companion about that little girl. "I'll tell you what it is," said he. "I really have got letters to write which must go by this post. There's my cigar-case on the dressing-table."

"I hope it will be long before I'm brought to such a state," said John, taking up the cigars in his hand.

"Let me have the case back," said Crosbie.

"A present from the little girl, I suppose?" said John. "All right, old fellow! you shall have it."

"There would be a nice brother-in-law for a man," said Crosbie to himself, as the door closed behind the retreating scion of the De Courcy family. And then, again, he took up his pen. The letter must be written, and therefore he threw himself upon the table, resolved that the words should come and the paper be filled.

Courcy Castle, October, 186—.

DEAREST LILY,—This is the first letter I ever wrote to you, except those little notes when I sent you my compliments discreetly,—and it sounds so odd. You will think that this does not come as soon as it should; but the truth is that after all I only got in here just before dinner yesterday. I stayed ever so long in Barchester, and came across such a queer character. For you must know I went to church, and afterwards fraternized with the clergyman who did the service; such a gentle old soul,—and, singularly enough, he is the grandfather of Lady Dumbello, who is staying here. I wonder what you'd think of Lady Dumbello, or how you'd like to be shut up in the same house with her for a week?

But with reference to my staying at Barchester, I must tell you the truth now, though I was a gross impostor the day that I went away. I wanted to avoid a parting on that last morning, and therefore I started much sooner than I need have done. I know you will be very angry with me; but open confession is good for the soul. You frustrated all my little plan by your early rising; and as I saw you standing on the terrace, looking after us as we went, I acknowledged that you had been right, and that I was wrong. When the time came, I was very glad to have you with me at the last moment.

My own dearest Lily, you cannot think how different this place is from the two houses at Allington, or how much I prefer the sort of life which belongs to the

latter. I know that I have been what the world calls worldly, but you will have to cure me of that. I have questioned myself very much since I left you, and I do not think that I am quite beyond the reach of a cure. At any rate, I will put myself trustingly into the doctor's hands. I know it is hard for a man to change his habits; but I can with truth say this for myself, that I was happy at Allington, enjoying every hour of the day, and that here I am ennuyé by everybody and nearly by everything. One of the girls of the house I do like; but as to other people, I can hardly find a companion among them, let alone a friend. However, it would not have done for me to have broken away from all such alliances too suddenly.

When I get up to London—and now I really am anxious to get there—I can write to you more at my ease, and more freely than I do here. I know that I am hardly myself among these people,—or rather, I am hardly myself as you know me, and as I hope you always will know me. But, nevertheless, I am not so overcome by the miasma but what I can tell you how truly I love you. Even though my spirit should be here, which it is not, my heart would be on the Allington lawns. That dear lawn and that dear bridge!

Give my kind love to Bell and your mother. I feel already that I might almost say my mother. And Lily, my darling, write to me at once. I expect your letters to me to be longer, and better, and brighter than mine to you. But I will endeavour to make mine nicer when I get back to town.

God bless you. Yours, with all my heart,

A. C.

As he had waxed warm with his writing he had forced himself to be affectionate, and, as he flattered himself, frank and candid. Nevertheless, he was partly conscious that he was preparing for himself a mode of escape in those allusions of his to his own worldliness; if escape should ultimately be necessary. "I have tried," he would then say; "I have struggled honestly, with my best efforts for success; but I am

not good enough for such success." I do not intend to say that he wrote with a premeditated intention of thus using his words; but as he wrote them he could not keep himself from reflecting that they might be used in that way.

He read his letter over, felt satisfied with it, and resolved that he might now free his mind from that consideration for the next forty-eight hours. Whatever might be his sins he had done his duty by Lily! And with this comfortable reflection he deposited his letter in the Courcy Castle letter-box.

CHAPTER XIX

THE SQUIRE MAKES A VISIT TO THE SMALL HOUSE

Mrs. Dale acknowledged to herself that she had not much ground for hoping that she should ever find in Crosbie's house much personal happiness for her future life. She did not dislike Mr. Crosbie, nor in any great degree mistrust him; but she had seen enough of him to make her certain that Lily's future home in London could not be a home for her. He was worldly, or, at least, a man of the world. He would be anxious to make the most of his income, and his life would be one long struggle, not perhaps for money, but for those things which money only can give. There are men to whom eight hundred a year is great wealth, and houses to which it brings all the comforts that life requires. But Crosbie was not such a man, nor would his house be such a house. Mrs. Dale hoped that Lily would be happy with him, and satisfied with his modes of life, and she strove to believe that such would be the case; but as regarded herself she was forced to confess that in such a marriage her child would be much divided from her. That pleasant abode to which she had long looked forward that she might have a welcome there in coming years should be among fields and trees, not

in some narrow London street. Lily must now become a city lady; but Bell would still be left to her, and it might still be hoped that Bell would find for herself some country home.

Since the day on which Lily had first told her mother of her engagement, Mrs. Dale had found herself talking much more fully and more frequently with Bell than with her younger daughter. As long as Crosbie was at Allington this was natural enough. He and Lily were of course together, while Bell remained with her mother. But the same state of things continued even after Crosbie was gone. It was not that there was any coolness or want of affection between the mother and daughter, but that Lily's heart was full of her lover, and that Mrs. Dale, though she had given her cordial consent to the marriage, felt that she had but few points of sympathy with her future son-in-law. She had never said, even to herself, that she disliked him; nay, she had sometimes declared to herself that she was fond of him. But, in truth, he was not a man after her own heart. He was not one who could ever be to her as her own son and her own child.

But she and Bell would pass hours together talking of Lily's prospects. "It seems so strange to me," said Mrs. Dale, "that she of all girls should have been fancied by such a man as Mr. Crosbie, or that she should have liked him. I cannot imagine Lily living in London."

"If he is good and affectionate to her she will be happy wherever he is," said Bell.

"I hope so;—I'm sure I hope so. But it seems as though she will be so far separated from us. It is not the distance, but the manner of life which makes the separation. I hope you'll never be taken so far from me."

"I don't think I shall allow myself to be taken up to London," said Bell, laughing. "But one can never tell. If I do you must follow us, mamma."

"I do not want another Mr. Crosbie for you, dear."

"But perhaps I may want one for myself. You need

not tremble quite yet, however. Apollos do not come this road every day."

"Poor Lily! Do you remember when she first called him Apollo? I do, well. I remember his coming here the day after Bernard brought him down, and how you were playing on the lawn, while I was in the other garden. I little thought then what it would come to."

"But, mamma, you don't regret it?"

"Not if it's to make her happy. If she can be happy with him, of course I shall not regret it; not though he were to take her to the world's end away from us. What else have I to look for but that she and you should both be happy?"

"Men in London are happy with their wives as well as men in the country."

"Oh, yes; of all women I should be the first to acknowledge that."

"And as to Adolphus himself, I do not know why we should distrust him."

"No, my dear; there is no reason. If I did distrust him, I should not have given so ready an assent to the marriage. But nevertheless——"

"The truth is, you don't like him, mamma."

"Not so cordially as I hope I may like any man whom you may choose for your husband."

And Lily, though she said nothing on the subject to Mrs. Dale, felt that her mother was in some degree estranged from her. Crosbie's name was frequently mentioned between them, but in the tone of Mrs. Dale's voice, and in her manner when she spoke of him, there was lacking that enthusiasm and heartiness which real sympathy would have produced. Lily did not analyse her own feelings, or closely make inquiry as to those of her mother, but she perceived that it was not all as she would have wished it to have been. "I know mamma does not love him," she said to Bell on the evening of the day on which she received Crosbie's first letter.

"Not as you do, Lily; but she does love him."

"Not as I do! To say that is nonsense, Bell; of

course she does not love him as I do. But the truth is she does not love him at all. Do you think I cannot see it?"

"I'm afraid that you see too much."

"She never says a word against him; but if she really liked him she would sometimes say a word in his favour. I do not think she would ever mention his name unless you or I spoke of him before her. If she did not approve of him, why did she not say so sooner?"

"That's hardly fair upon mamma," said Bell, with some earnestness. "She does not disapprove of him, and she never did. You know mamma well enough to be sure that she would not interfere with us in such a matter without very strong reason. As regards Mr. Crosbie, she gave her consent without a moment's hesitation."

"Yes, she did."

"How can you say, then, that she disapproves of him?"

"I didn't mean to find fault with mamma. Perhaps it will come all right."

"It will come all right." But Bell, though she made this very satisfactory promise, was as well aware as either of the others that the family would be divided when Crosbie should have married Lily and taken her off to London.

On the following morning Mrs. Dale and Bell were sitting together. Lily was above in her own room, either writing to her lover, or reading his letter, or thinking of him, or working for him. In some way she was employed on his behalf, and with this object she was alone. It was now the middle of October, and the fire was lit in Mrs. Dale's drawing-room. The window which opened upon the lawn was closed, the heavy curtains had been put back in their places, and it had been acknowledged as an unwelcome fact that the last of the summer was over. This was always a sorrow to Mrs. Dale; but it is one of those sorrows which hardly admit of open expression.

"Bell," she said, looking up suddenly; "there's your uncle at the window. Let him in." For now, since the putting up of the curtains, the window had been bolted as well as closed. So Bell got up, and opened a passage for the squire's entrance. It was not often that he came down in this way, and when he did do so it was generally for some purpose which had been expressed before.

"What! fires already?" said he. "I never have fires at the other house in the morning till the first of November. I like to see a spark in the grate after dinner."

"I like a fire when I'm cold," said Mrs. Dale. But this was a subject on which the squire and his sister-in-law had differed before, and as Mr. Dale had some business in hand, he did not now choose to waste his energy in supporting his own views on the question of fires.

"Bell, my dear," said he, "I want to speak to your mother for a minute or two on a matter of business. You wouldn't mind leaving us for a little while, would you?" Whereupon Bell collected up her work and went upstairs to her sister. "Uncle Christopher is below with mamma," said she, "talking about business. I suppose it is something to do with your marriage." But Bell was wrong. The squire's visit had no reference to Lily's marriage.

Mrs. Dale did not move or speak a word when Bell was gone, though it was evident that the squire paused in order that she might ask some question of him. "Mary," said he, at last, "I'll tell you what it is that I have come to say to you." Whereupon she put the piece of needlework which was in her hands down upon the work-basket before her, and settled herself to listen to him.

"I wish to speak to you about Bell."

"About Bell?" said Mrs. Dale, as though much surprised that he should have anything to say to her respecting her eldest daughter.

"Yes, about Bell. Here's Lily going to be married, and it will be well that Bell should be married too."

"I don't see that at all," said Mrs. Dale. "I am by no means in a hurry to be rid of her."

"No, I dare say not. But, of course, you only regard her welfare, and I can truly say that I do the same. There would be no necessity for hurry as to a marriage for her under ordinary circumstances, but there may be circumstances to make such a thing desirable, and I think that there are." It was evident from the squire's tone and manner that he was very much in earnest; but it was also evident that he found some difficulty in opening out the budget with which he had prepared himself. He hesitated a little in his voice, and seemed to be almost nervous. Mrs. Dale, with some little spice of ill-nature, altogether abstained from assisting him. She was jealous of interference from him about her girls, and though she was of course bound to listen to him, she did so with a prejudice against and almost with a resolve to oppose anything that he might say. When he had finished his little speech about circumstances, the squire paused again; but Mrs. Dale still sat silent, with her eyes fixed upon his face.

"I love your children very dearly," said he, "though I believe you hardly give me credit for doing so."

"I am sure you do," said Mrs. Dale, "and they are both well aware of it."

"And I am very anxious that they should be comfortably established in life. I have no children of my own, and those of my two brothers are everything to me."

Mrs. Dale had always considered it as a matter of course that Bernard should be the squire's heir, and had never felt that her daughters had any claim on that score. It was a well-understood thing in the family that the senior male Dale should have all the Dale property and all the Dale money. She fully recognized even the propriety of such an arrangement. But it seemed to her that the squire was almost guilty of hypocrisy in naming his nephew and his two nieces together, as though they were the joint heirs of his

love. Bernard was his adopted son, and no one had begrudged to the uncle the right of making such adoption. Bernard was everything to him, and as being his heir was bound to obey him in many things. But her daughters were no more to him than any nieces might be to any uncle. He had nothing to do with their disposal in marriage; and the mother's spirit was already up in arms and prepared to do battle for her own independence, and for that of her children. "If Bernard would marry well," said she, "I have no doubt it would be a comfort to you,"—meaning to imply thereby that the squire had no right to trouble himself about any other marriage.

"That's just it," said the squire. "It would be a great comfort to me. And if he and Bell could make up their minds together, it would, I should think, be a great comfort to you also."

"Bernard and Bell!" exclaimed Mrs. Dale. No idea of such a union had ever yet come upon her, and now in her surprise she sat silent. She had always liked Bernard Dale, having felt for him more family affection than for any other of the Dale family beyond her own hearth. He had been very intimate in her house, having made himself almost as a brother to her girls. But she had never thought of him as a husband for either of them.

"Then Bell has not spoken to you about it," said the squire.

"Never a word."

"And you had never thought about it?"

"Certainly not."

"I have thought about it a great deal. For some years I have always been thinking of it. I have set my heart upon it, and shall be very unhappy if it cannot be brought about. They are both very dear to me,—dearer than anybody else. If I could see them man and wife, I should not much care then how soon I left the old place to them."

There was a purer touch of feeling in this than the squire had ever before shown in his sister-in-law's

presence, and more heartiness than she had given him the credit of possessing. And she could not but acknowledge to herself that her own child was included in this unexpected warmth of love, and that she was bound at any rate to entertain some gratitude for such kindness.

"It is good of you to think of her," said the mother; "very good."

"I think a great deal about her," said the squire. "But that does not much matter now. The fact is, that she has declined Bernard's offer."

"Has Bernard offered to her?"

"So he tells me; and she has refused him. It may perhaps be natural that she should do so, never having taught herself to look at him in the light of a lover. I don't blame her at all. I am not angry with her."

"Angry with her! No. You can hardly be angry with her for not being in love with her cousin."

"I say that I am not angry with her. But I think she might undertake to consider the question. You would like such a match, would you not?"

Mrs. Dale did not at first make any answer, but began to revolve the thing in her mind, and to look at it in various points of view. There was a great deal in such an arrangement which at the first sight recommended it to her very strongly. All the local circumstances were in its favour. As regarded herself it would promise to her all that she had ever desired. It would give her a prospect of seeing very much of Lily; for if Bell were settled at the old family house, Crosbie would naturally be much with his friend. She liked Bernard also; and for a moment or two fancied, as she turned it all over in her mind, that, even yet, if such a marriage were to take place, there might grow up something like true regard between her and the old squire. How happy would be her old age in that Small House, if Bell with her children were living so close to her!

"Well?" said the squire, who was looking very intently into her face.

"I was thinking," said Mrs. Dale. "Do you say that she has already refused him?"

"I am afraid she has; but then you know——"

"It must of course be left for her to judge."

"If you mean that she cannot be made to marry her cousin, of course we all know she can't."

"I mean rather more than that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"That the matter must be left altogether to her own decision; that no persuasion must be used by you or me. If he can persuade her, indeed——"

"Yes, exactly. He must persuade her. I quite agree with you that he should have liberty to plead his own cause. But look you here, Mary;—she has always been a very good child to you——"

"Indeed she has."

"And a word from you would go a long way with her,—as it ought. If she knows that you would like her to marry her cousin, it will make her think it her duty——"

"Ah! but that is just what I cannot try to make her think."

"Will you let me speak, Mary? You take me up and scold me before the words are half out of my mouth. Of course I know that in these days a young lady is not to be compelled into marrying anybody;—not but that, as far as I can see, they did better than they do now when they had not quite so much of their own way."

"I never would take upon myself to ask a child to marry any man."

"But you may explain to her that it is her duty to give such a proposal much thought before it is absolutely refused. A girl either is in love or she is not. If she is, she is ready to jump down a man's throat; and that was the case with Lily."

"She never thought of the man till he had proposed to her fully."

"Well, never mind now. But if a girl is not in love, she thinks she is bound to swear and declare that she never will be so."

"I don't think Bell ever declared anything of the kind."

"Yes, she did. She told Bernard that she didn't love him and couldn't love him,—and, in fact, that she wouldn't think anything more about him. Now, Mary, that's what I call being headstrong and positive. I don't want to drive her, and I don't want you to drive her. But here is an arrangement which for her will be a very good one; you must admit that. We all know that she is on excellent terms with Bernard. It isn't as though they had been falling out and hating each other all their lives. She told him that she was very fond of him, and talked nonsense about being his sister, and all that."

"I don't see that it was nonsense at all."

"Yes, it was nonsense,—on such an occasion. If a man asks a girl to marry him, he doesn't want her to talk to him about being his sister. I think it is nonsense. If she would only consider about it properly she would soon learn to love him."

"That lesson, if it be learned at all, must be learned without any tutor."

"You won't do anything to help me then?"

"I will, at any rate, do nothing to mar you. And, to tell the truth, I must think over the matter fully before I can decide what I had better say to Bell about it. From her not speaking to me——"

"I think she ought to have told you."

"No, Mr. Dale. Had she accepted him, of course she would have told me. Had she thought of doing so she might probably have consulted me. But if she made up her mind that she must reject him——"

"She oughtn't to have made up her mind."

"But if she did, it seems natural to me that she should speak of it to no one. She might probably think that Bernard would be as well pleased that it should not be known."

"Psha,—known!—of course it will be known. As you want time to consider of it, I will say nothing more now. If she were my daughter, I should have

no hesitation in telling her what I thought best for her welfare."

"I have none; though I may have some in making up my mind as to what is best for her welfare. But, Mr. Dale, you may be sure of this; I will speak to her very earnestly of your kindness and love for her. And I wish you would believe that I feel your regard for her very strongly."

In answer to this he merely shook his head, and hummed and hawed. "You would be glad to see them married, as regards yourself?" he asked.

"Certainly I would," said Mrs. Dale. "I have always liked Bernard, and I believe my girl would be safe with him. But then, you see, it's a question on which my own likings or dislikings should not have any bearing."

And so they parted, the squire making his way back again through the drawing-room window. He was not above half pleased with his interview; but then he was a man for whom half-pleasure almost sufficed. He rarely indulged any expectation that people would make themselves agreeable to him. Mrs. Dale, since she had come to the Small House, had never been a source of satisfaction to him, but he did not on that account regret that he had brought her there. He was a constant man; urgent in carrying out his own plans, but not sanguine in doing so, and by no means apt to expect that all things would go smooth with him. He had made up his mind that his nephew and his niece should be married, and should he ultimately fail in this, such failure would probably embitter his future life;—but it was not in the nature of the man to be angry in the meantime, or to fume and scold because he met with opposition. He had told Mrs. Dale that he loved Bell dearly. So he did, though he seldom spoke to her with much show of special regard, and never was soft and tender with her. But, on the other hand, he did not now love her the less because she opposed his wishes. He was a constant, undemonstrative man, given rather to brooding than to

thinking; harder in his words than in his thoughts, with more of heart than others believed, or than he himself knew; but, above all, he was a man who having once desired a thing would desire it always.

Mrs. Dale, when she was left alone, began to turn over the question in her mind in a much fuller manner than the squire's presence had as yet made possible for her. Would not such a marriage as this be for them all the happiest domestic arrangement which circumstances could afford? Her daughter would have no fortune, but here would be prepared for her all the comforts which fortune can give. She would be received into her uncle's house, not as some penniless, portionless bride whom Bernard might have married and brought home, but as the wife whom of all others Bernard's friends had thought desirable for him. And then, as regarded Mrs. Dale herself, there would be nothing in such a marriage which would not be delightful to her. It would give a realization to all her dreams of future happiness.

But, as she said to herself over and over again, all that must go for nothing. It must be for Bell, and for her only, to answer Bernard's question. In her mind there was something sacred in that idea of love. She would regard her daughter almost as a castaway if she were to marry any man without absolutely loving him, —loving him as Lily loved her lover, with all her heart and all her strength.

With such a conviction as this strong upon her, she felt that she could not say much to Bell that would be of any service.

CHAPTER XX

DR. CROFTS

If there was anything in the world as to which Isabella Dale was quite certain, it was this—that she was not in love with Dr. Crofts. As to being in love with her

cousin Bernard, she had never had occasion to ask herself any question on that head. She liked him very well, but she had never thought of marrying him; and now, when he made his proposal, she could not bring herself to think of it. But as regards Dr. Crofts, she had thought of it, and had made up her mind;—in the manner above described.

It may be said that she could not have been justified in discussing the matter even within her own bosom, unless authorized to do so by Dr. Crofts himself. Let it then be considered that Dr. Crofts had given her some such authority. This may be done in more ways than one; and Miss Dale could not have found herself asking herself questions about him, unless there had been fitting occasion for her to do so.

The profession of a medical man in a small provincial town is not often one which gives to its owner in early life a large income. Perhaps in no career has a man to work harder for what he earns, or to do more work without earning anything. It has sometimes seemed to me as though the young doctors and the old doctors had agreed to divide between them the different results of their profession,—the young doctors doing all the work and the old doctors taking all the money. If this be so it may account for that appearance of premature gravity which is borne by so many of the medical profession. Under such an arrangement a man may be excused for a desire to put away childish things very early in life.

Dr. Crofts had now been practising in Guestwick nearly seven years, having settled himself in that town when he was twenty-three years old, and being at this period about thirty. During those seven years his skill and industry had been so fully admitted that he had succeeded in obtaining the medical care of all the paupers in the union, for which work he was paid at the rate of one hundred pounds a year. He was also assistant-surgeon at a small hospital which was maintained in that town, and held two or three other similar public positions, all of which attested his respectability

and general proficiency. They, moreover, thoroughly saved him from any of the dangers of idleness; but, unfortunately, they did not enable him to regard himself as a successful professional man. Whereas old Dr. Gruffen, of whom but few people spoke well, had made a fortune in Guestwick, and even still drew from the ailments of the town a considerable and hardly yet decreasing income. Now this was hard upon Dr. Crofts—unless there was existing some such well-understood arrangement as that above named.

He had been known to the family of the Dales long previous to his settlement at Guestwick, and had been very intimate with them from that time to the present day. Of all the men, young or old, whom Mrs. Dale counted among her intimate friends, he was the one whom she most trusted and admired. And he was a man to be trusted by those who knew him well. He was not bright and always ready, as was Crosbie, nor had he all the practical worldly good sense of Bernard Dale. In mental power I doubt whether he was superior to John Eames;—to John Eames, such as he might become when the period of his hobbledehoyhood should have altogether passed away. But Crofts, compared with the other three, as they all were at present, was a man more to be trusted than any of them. And there was, moreover, about him an occasional dash of humour, without which Mrs. Dale would hardly have regarded him with that thorough liking which she had for him. But it was a quiet humour, apt to show itself when he had but one friend with him, rather than in general society. Crosbie, on the other hand, would be much more bright among a dozen, than he could with a single companion. Bernard Dale was never bright; and as for Johnny Eames ——; but in this matter of brightness, Johnny Eames had not yet shown to the world what his character might be.

It was now two years since Crofts had been called upon for medical advice on behalf of his friend Mrs.

Dale. She had then been ill for a long period—some two or three months, and Dr. Crofts had been frequent in his visits at Allington. At that time he became very intimate with Mrs. Dale's daughters, and especially so with the eldest. Young unmarried doctors ought perhaps to be excluded from houses in which there are young ladies. I know, at any rate, that many sage matrons hold very strongly to that opinion, thinking, no doubt, that doctors ought to get themselves married before they venture to begin working for a living. Mrs. Dale, perhaps, regarded her own girls as still merely children, for Bell, the elder, was then hardly eighteen; or perhaps she held imprudent and heterodox opinions on this subject; or it may be that she selfishly preferred Dr. Crofts, with all the danger to her children, to Dr. Gruffen, with all the danger to herself. But the result was that the young doctor one day informed himself, as he was riding back to Guestwick, that much of his happiness in this world would depend on his being able to marry Mrs. Dale's eldest daughter. At that time his total income amounted to little more than two hundred a year, and he had resolved within his own mind that Dr. Gruffen was esteemed as much the better doctor by the general public opinion of Guestwick, and that Dr. Gruffen's sandy-haired assistant would even have a better chance of success in the town than himself, should it ever come to pass that the doctor was esteemed too old for personal practice. Crofts had no fortune of his own, and he was aware that Miss Dale had none. Then, under those circumstances, what was he to do?

It is not necessary that we should inquire at any great length into those love passages of the doctor's life which took place three years before the commencement of this narrative. He made no declaration to Bell; but Bell, young as she was, understood well that he would fain have done so, had not his courage failed him, or rather had not his prudence prevented him. To Mrs. Dale he did speak, not openly avowing his love even to her, but hinting at it, and then talking to

her of his unsatisfied hopes and professional disappointments. "It is not that I complain of being poor as I am," said he; "or at any rate, not so poor that my poverty must be any source of discomfort to me; but I could hardly marry with such an income as I have at present."

"But it will increase, will it not?" said Mrs. Dale.

"It may some day, when I am becoming an old man," he said. "But of what use will it be to me then?"

Mrs. Dale could not tell him that, as far as her voice in the matter went, he was welcome to woo her daughter and marry her, poor as he was, and doubly poor as they would both be together on such a pittance. He had not even mentioned Bell's name, and had he done so she could only have bade him wait and hope. After that he said nothing further to her upon the subject. To Bell he spoke no word of overt love; but on an autumn day, when Mrs. Dale was already convalescent, and the repetition of his professional visits had become unnecessary, he got her to walk with him through the half-hidden shrubbery paths, and then told her things which he should never have told her, if he really wished to bind her heart to his. He repeated that story of his income, and explained to her that his poverty was only grievous to him in that it prevented him from thinking of marriage. "I suppose it must," said Bell. "I should think it wrong to ask any lady to share such an income as mine," said he. Whereupon Bell had suggested to him that some ladies had incomes of their own, and that he might in that way get over the difficulty. "I should be afraid of myself in marrying a girl with money," said he; "besides, that is altogether out of the question now." Of course Bell did not ask him why it was out of the question, and for a time they went on walking in silence. "It is a hard thing to do," he then said,—not looking at her, but looking at the gravel on which he stood. "It is a hard thing to do, but I will determine to think of it no further. I believe a man may be as

happy single as he may married,—almost." "Perhaps more so," said Bell. Then the doctor left her, and Bell, as I have said before, made up her mind with great firmness that she was not in love with him. I may certainly say that there was nothing in the world as to which she was so certain as she was of this.

And now, in these days, Dr. Crofts did not come over to Allington very often. Had any of the family in the Small House been ill, he would have been there of course. The squire himself employed the apothecary in the village, or if higher aid was needed, would send for Dr. Gruffen. On the occasion of Mrs. Dale's party, Crofts was there, having been specially invited; but Mrs. Dale's special invitations to her friends were very few, and the doctor was well aware that he must himself make occasion for going there if he desired to see the inmates of the house. But he very rarely made such occasion, perhaps feeling that he was more in his element at the workhouse and the hospital.

Just at this time, however, he made one very great and unexpected step towards success in his profession. He was greatly surprised one morning by being summoned to the Manor House to attend upon Lord De Guest. The family at the Manor had employed Dr. Gruffen for the last thirty years, and Crofts, when he received the earl's message, could hardly believe the words. "The earl ain't very bad," said the servant, "but he would be glad to see you if possible a little before dinner."

"You're sure he wants to see me?" said Crofts.

"Oh, yes; I'm sure enough of that, sir."

"It wasn't Dr. Gruffen?"

"No, sir; it wasn't Dr. Gruffen. I believe his lordship's had about enough of Dr. Gruffen. The doctor took to chaffing his lordship one day."

"Chaffed his lordship;—his hands and feet, and that sort of thing?" suggested the doctor.

"Hands and feet!" said the man. "Lord bless you, sir, he poked his fun at him, just as though he was nobody. I didn't hear, but Mrs. Connor says that my

lord's back was up terribly high." And so Dr. Crofts got on his horse and rode up to Guestwick Manor.

The earl was alone, Lady Julia having already gone to Courcy Castle. "How d'ye do, how d'ye do?" said the earl. "I'm not very ill, but I want to get a little advice from you. It's quite a trifle, but I thought it well to see somebody." Whereupon Dr. Crofts of course declared that he was happy to wait upon his lordship.

"I know all about you, you know," said the earl. "Your grandmother Stoddard was a very old friend of my aunt's. You don't remember Lady Jemima?"

"No," said Crofts. "I never had that honour."

"An excellent old woman, and knew your grandmother Stoddard well. You see, Gruffen has been attending us for I don't know how many years; but upon my word——" and then the earl stopped himself.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good," said Crofts, with a slight laugh.

"Perhaps it'll blow me some good, for Gruffen never did me any. The fact is this; I'm very well, you know;—as strong as a horse."

"You look pretty well."

"No man could be better,—not of my age. I'm sixty, you know."

"You don't look as though you were ailing."

"I'm always out in the open air, and that, I take it, is the best thing for a man."

"There's nothing like plenty of exercise, certainly."

"And I'm always taking exercise," said the earl. "There isn't a man about the place works much harder than I do. And, let me tell you, sir, when you undertake to keep six or seven hundred acres of land in your own hand, you must look after it, unless you mean to lose money by it."

"I've always heard that your lordship is a good farmer."

"Well, yes; wherever the grass may grow about my place, it doesn't grow under my feet. You won't often find me in bed at six o'clock, I can tell you."

After this Dr. Crofts ventured to ask his lordship as to what special physical deficiency his own aid was invoked at the present time.

"Ah, I was just coming to that," said the earl. "They tell me it's a very dangerous practice to go to sleep after dinner."

"It's not very uncommon at any rate," said the doctor.

"I suppose not; but Lady Julia is always at me about it. And, to tell the truth, I think I sleep almost too sound when I get to my arm-chair in the drawing-room. Sometimes my sister really can't wake me;—so, at least, she says."

"And how's your appetite at dinner?"

"Oh, I'm quite right there. I never eat any luncheon, you know, and enjoy my dinner thoroughly. Then I drink three or four glasses of port wine——"

"And feel sleepy afterwards?"

"That's just it," said the earl.

It is not perhaps necessary that we should inquire what was the exact nature of the doctor's advice; but it was, at any rate, given in such a way that the earl said he would be glad to see him again.

"And look here, Dr. Crofts, I'm all alone just at present. Suppose you come over and dine with me to-morrow; then, if I should go to sleep, you know, you'll be able to let me know whether Lady Julia doesn't exaggerate. Just between ourselves, I don't quite believe all she says about my—my snoring, you know."

Whether it was that the earl restrained his appetite when at dinner under the doctor's eyes, or whether the mid-day mutton chop which had been ordered for him had the desired effect, or whether the doctor's conversation was more lively than that of the Lady Julia, we will not say; but the earl, on the evening in question, was triumphant. As he sat in his easy-chair after dinner he hardly winked above once or twice; and when he had taken the large bowl of tea, which he usually swallowed in a semi-somnolent condition, he was quite lively.

"Ah, yes," he said, jumping up and rubbing his eyes; "I think I do feel lighter. I enjoy a snooze after dinner; I do, indeed; I like it; but then, when one comes to go to bed, one does it in such a sneaking sort of way, as though one were in disgrace! And my sister, she thinks it a crime—literally a sin, to go to sleep in a chair. Nobody ever caught her napping! By-the-by, Dr. Crofts, did you know that Mr. Crosbie whom Bernard Dale brought down to Allington? Lady Julia and he are staying at the same house now."

"I met him once at Mrs. Dale's."

"Going to marry one of the girls, isn't he?"

Whereupon Dr. Crofts explained that Mr. Crosbie was engaged to Lilian Dale.

"Ah, yes; a nice girl, I'm told. You know all those Dales are connections of ours. My sister Fanny married their uncle Orlando. My brother-in-law doesn't like travelling, and so I don't see very much of him; but of course I'm interested about the family."

"They're very old friends of mine," said Crofts.

"Yes, I dare say. There are two girls, are there not?"

"Yes, two."

"And Miss Lily is the youngest. There's nothing about the elder one getting married, is there?"

"I've not heard anything of it."

"A very pretty girl she is, too. I remember seeing her at her uncle's last year. I shouldn't wonder if she were to marry her cousin Bernard. He is to have the property, you know; and he's my nephew."

"I'm not quite sure that it's a good thing for cousins to marry," said Crofts.

"They do, you know, very often; and it suits some family arrangements. I suppose Dale must provide for them, and that would take one off his hands without any trouble."

Dr. Crofts didn't exactly see the matter in this light, but he was not anxious to argue it very closely with the earl. "The younger one," he said, "has provided for herself."

"What; by getting a husband? But I suppose Dale must give her something. They're not married yet, you know, and, from what I hear, that fellow may prove a slippery customer. He'll not marry her unless old Dale gives her something. You'll see if he does. I'm told that he has got another string to his bow at Courcy Castle."

Soon after this, Crofts took his horse and rode home, having promised the earl that he would dine with him again before long.

"It'll be a great convenience to me if you'd come about that time," said the earl, "and as you're a bachelor perhaps you won't mind it. You'll come on Thursday at seven, will you? Take care of yourself. It's as dark as pitch. John, go and open the first gates for Dr. Crofts." And then the earl took himself off to bed.

Crofts, as he rode home, could not keep his mind from thinking of the two girls at Allington. "He'll not marry her unless old Dale gives her something." Had it come to that with the world, that a man must be bribed into keeping his engagement with a lady? Was there no romance left among mankind,—no feeling of chivalry? "He's got another string to his bow at Courcy Castle," said the earl; and his lordship seemed to be in no degree shocked as he said it. It was in this tone that men spoke of women now-a-days, and yet he himself had felt such awe of the girl he loved, and such a fear lest he might injure her in her worldly position, that he had not dared to tell her that he loved her.

CHAPTER XXI

JOHN EAMES ENCOUNTERS TWO ADVENTURES, AND DISPLAYS GREAT COURAGE IN BOTH

Lily thought that her lover's letter was all that it should be. She was not quite aware what might be the course of post between Courcy and Allington, and

had not, therefore, felt very grievously disappointed when the letter did not come on the very first day. She had, however, in the course of the morning walked down to the post-office, in order that she might be sure that it was not remaining there.

"Why, miss, they be all delivered; you know that," said Mrs. Crump, the post-mistress.

"But one might be left behind, I thought."

"John Postman went up to the house this very day, with a newspaper for your mamma. I can't make letters for people if folks don't write them."

"But they are left behind sometimes, Mrs. Crump. He wouldn't come up with one letter if he'd got nothing else for anybody in the street."

"Indeed but he would then. I wouldn't let him leave a letter here no how, nor yet a paper. It's no good your coming down here for letters, Miss Lily. If he don't write to you, I can't make him do it." And so poor Lily went home discomforted.

But the letter came on the next morning, and all was right. According to her judgment it lacked nothing, either in fulness or in affection. When he told her how he had planned his early departure in order that he might avoid the pain of parting with her on the last moment, she smiled and pressed the paper, and rejoiced inwardly that she had got the better of him as to that manœuvre. And then she kissed the words which told her that he had been glad to have her with him at the last moment. When he declared that he had been happier at Allington than he was at Courcy, she believed him thoroughly, and rejoiced that it should be so. And when he accused himself of being worldly, she excused him, persuading herself that he was nearly perfect in this respect as in others. Of course a man living in London, and having to earn his bread out in the world, must be more worldly than a country girl; but the fact of his being able to love such a girl, to choose such a one for his wife,—was not that alone sufficient proof that the world had not enslaved him? "My heart is on the Allington lawns," he said; and

then, as she read the words, she kissed the paper again.

In her eyes, and to her ears, and to her heart, the letter was a beautiful letter. I believe there is no bliss greater than that which a thorough love-letter gives to a girl who knows that in receiving it she commits no fault,—who can open it before her father and mother with nothing more than the slight blush which the consciousness of her position gives her. And of all love-letters the first must be the sweetest! What a value there is in every word! How each expression is scanned and turned to the best account! With what importance are all those little phrases invested, which too soon become mere phrases, used as a matter of course. Crosbie had finished his letter by bidding God bless her; "and you too," said Lily, pressing the letter to her bosom.

"Does he say anything particular?" asked Mrs. Dale.

"Yes, mamma; it's all very particular."

"But there's nothing for the public ear."

"He sends his love to you and Bell."

"We are very much obliged to him."

"So you ought to be. And he says that he went to church going through Barchester, and that the clergyman was the grandfather of that Lady Dumbello. When he got to Courcy Castle Lady Dumbello was there."

"What a singular coincidence!" said Mrs. Dale.

"I won't tell you a word more about his letter," said Lily. So she folded it up, and put it in her pocket. But as soon as she found herself alone in her own room, she had it out again, and read it over some half-a-dozen times.

That was the occupation of her morning;—that, and the manufacture of some very intricate piece of work which was intended for the adornment of Mr. Crosbie's person. Her hands, however, were very full of work;—or, rather, she intended that they should be full. She would take with her to her new home, when she

was married, all manner of household gear, the produce of her own industry and economy. She had declared that she wanted to do something for her future husband, and she would begin that something at once. And in this matter she did not belie her promises to herself, or allow her good intentions to evaporate unaccomplished. She soon surrounded herself with harder tasks than those embroidered slippers with which she indulged herself immediately after his departure. And Mrs. Dale and Bell,—though in their gentle way they laughed at her,—nevertheless they worked with her, sitting sternly to their long tasks, in order that Crosbie's house might not be empty when their darling should go to take her place there as his wife.

But it was absolutely necessary that the letter should be answered. It would in her eyes have been a great sin to have let that day's post go without carrying a letter from her to Courcy Castle,—a sin of which she felt no temptation to be guilty. It was an exquisite pleasure to her to seat herself at her little table, with her neat desk and small appurtenances for epistle-craft, and to feel that she had a letter to write in which she had truly much to say. Hitherto her correspondence had been uninteresting and almost weak in its nature. From her mother and sister she had hardly yet been parted; and though she had other friends, she had seldom found herself with very much to tell them by post. What could she communicate to Mary Eames at Guestwick, which should be in itself exciting as she wrote it? When she wrote to John Eames, and told "Dear John" that mamma hoped to have the pleasure of seeing him to tea at such an hour, the work of writing was of little moment to her, though the note when written became one of the choicest treasures of him to whom it was addressed.

But now the matter was very different. When she saw the words "Dearest Adolphus" on the paper before her, she was startled with their significance. "And four months ago I had never even heard of him," she said to herself, almost with awe. And now he was

more to her, and nearer to her, than even was her sister or her mother! She recollected how she had laughed at him behind his back, and called him a swell on the first day of his coming to the Small House, and how, also, she had striven, in her innocent way, to look her best when called upon to go out and walk with the stranger from London. He was no longer a stranger now, but her own dearest friend.

She had put down her pen that she might think of all this—by no means for the first time—and then resumed it with a sudden start as though fearing that the postman might be in the village before her letter was finished. "Dearest Adolphus, I need not tell you how delighted I was when your letter was brought to me this morning." But I need not repeat the whole of her letter here. She had no incident to relate, none even so interesting as that of Mr. Crosbie's encounter with Mr. Harding at Barchester. She had met no Lady Dumbello, and had no counterpart to Lady Alexandrina, of whom, as a friend, she could say a word in praise. John Eames's name she did not mention, knowing that John Eames was not a favourite with Mr. Crosbie; nor had she anything to say of John Eames, that had not been already said. He had, indeed, promised to come over to Allington; but this visit had not been made when Lily wrote her first letter to Crosbie. It was a sweet, good, honest love-letter, full of assurances of unalterable affection and unlimited confidence, indulging in a little quiet fun as to the grandees of Courcy Castle, and ending with a promise that she would be happy and contented if she might receive his letters constantly, and live with the hope of seeing him at Christmas.

"I am in time, Mrs. Crump, am I not?" she said, as she walked into the post-office.

"Of course you be,—for the next half-hour. T' postman—he bain't stirred from t' ale'us yet. Just put it into t' box, wull ye?"

"But you won't leave it there?"

"Leave it there! Did you ever hear the like of

that? If you're afeared to put it in, you can take it away; that's all about it, Miss Lily." And then Mrs. Crump turned away to her avocations at the washing-tub. Mrs. Crump had a bad temper, but perhaps she had some excuse. A separate call was made upon her time with reference to almost every letter brought to her office, and for all this, as she often told her friends in profound disgust, she received as salary no more than "tuppence farden a day. It don't find me in shoe-leather; no more it don't." As Mrs. Crump was never seen out of her own house, unless it was in church once a month, this latter assertion about her shoe-leather could hardly have been true.

Lily had received another letter, and had answered it before Eames made his promised visit to Allington. He, as will be remembered, had also had a correspondence. He had answered Miss Roper's letter, and had since that been living in fear of two things; in a lesser fear of some terrible rejoinder from Amelia, and in a greater fear of a more terrible visit from his lady-love. Were she to swoop down in very truth upon his Guestwick home, and declare herself to his mother and sister as his affianced bride, what mode of escape would then be left for him? But this she had not yet done, nor had she even answered his cruel missive.

"What an ass I am to be afraid of her!" he said to himself as he walked along under the elms of Guestwick Manor, which overspread the road to Allington. When he first went over to Allington after his return home, he had mounted himself on horseback, and had gone forth brilliant with spurs, and trusting somewhat to the glories of his dress and gloves. But he had then known nothing of Lily's engagement. Now he was contented to walk; and as he had taken up his slouched hat and stick in the passage of his mother's house, he had been very indifferent as to his appearance. He walked quickly along the road, taking for the first three miles the shade of the Guestwick elms, and keeping his feet on the broad greensward which skirts the outside of the

earl's palings. "What an ass I am to be afraid of her!" And as he swung his big stick in his hand, striking a tree here and there, and knocking the stones from his path, he began to question himself in earnest, and to be ashamed of his position in the world. "Nothing on earth shall make me marry her," he said; "not if they bring a dozen actions against me. She knows as well as I do, that I have never intended to marry her. It's a cheat from beginning to end. If she comes down here. I'll tell her so before my mother." But as the vision of her sudden arrival came before his eyes, he acknowledged to himself that he still held her in great fear. He had told her that he loved her. He had written as much as that. If taxed with so much, he must confess his sin.

Then, by degrees, his mind turned away from Amelia Roper to Lily Dale, not giving him a prospect much more replete with enjoyment than that other one. He had said that he would call at Allington before he returned to town, and he was now redeeming his promise. But he did not know why he should go there. He felt that he should sit silent and abashed in Mrs. Dale's drawing-room, confessing by his demeanour that secret which it behoved him now to hide from every one. He could not talk easily before Lily, nor could he speak to her of the only subject which would occupy his thoughts when in her presence. If indeed, he might find her alone—— But, perhaps that might be worse for him than any other condition.

When he was shown into the drawing-room there was nobody there. "They were here a minute ago, all three," said the servant-girl. "If you'll walk down the garden, Mr. John, you'll be sure to find some of 'em." So John Eames, with a little hesitation walked down the garden.

First of all he went the whole way round the walks, meeting nobody. Then he crossed the lawn, returning again to the farther end; and there, emerging from the little path which led from the Great House, he encountered Lily alone. "Oh, John," she said, "how

d'ye do? I'm afraid you did not find anybody in the house. Mamma and Bell are with Hopkins, away in the large kitchen-garden."

"I've just come over," said Eames, "because I promised. I said I'd come before I went back to London."

"And they'll be very glad to see you, and so am I. Shall we go after them into the other grounds? But perhaps you walked over and are tired."

"I did walk," said Eames; "not that I am very tired." But in truth he did not wish to go after Mrs. Dale, though he was altogether at a loss as to what he would say to Lily while remaining with her. He had fancied that he would like to have some opportunity of speaking to her alone before he went away;—of making some special use of the last interview which he should have with her before she became a married woman. But now the opportunity was there, and he hardly dared to avail himself of it.

"You'll stay and dine with us," said Lily.

"No, I'll not do that, for I especially told my mother that I would be back."

"I'm sure it was very good of you to walk so far to see us. If you really are not tired, I think we will go to mamma, as she would be very sorry to miss you."

This she said, remembering at the moment what had been Crosbie's injunctions to her about John Eames. But John had resolved that he would say those words which he had come to speak, and that, as Lily was there with him, he would avail himself of the chance which fortune had given him.

"I don't think I'll go into the squire's garden," he said.

"Uncle Christopher is not there. He is about the farm somewhere."

"If you don't mind, Lily, I think I'll stay here. I suppose they'll be back soon. Of course I should like to see them before I go away to London. But, Lily, I came over now chiefly to see you. It was you who asked me to promise."

Had Crosbie been right in those remarks of his?

Had she been imprudent in her little endeavour to be cordially kind to her old friend? "Shall we go into the drawing-room?" she said, feeling that she would be in some degree safer there than out among the shrubs and paths of the garden. And I think she was right in this. A man will talk of love out among the lilacs and roses, who would be stricken dumb by the demure propriety of the four walls of a drawing-room. John Eames also had some feeling of this kind, for he determined to remain out in the garden, if he could so manage it.

"I don't want to go in unless you wish it," he said. "Indeed, I'd rather stay here. So, Lily, you're going to be married?" And thus he rushed at once into the middle of his discourse.

"Yes," said she, "I believe I am."

"I have not told you yet that I congratulated you."

"I have known very well that you did so in your heart. I have always been sure that you wished me well."

"Indeed I have. And if congratulating a person is hoping that she may always be happy, I do congratulate you. But, Lily——" And then he paused, abashed by the beauty, purity, and woman's grace which had forced him to love her.

"I think I understand all that you would say. I do not want ordinary words to tell me that I am to count you among my best friends."

"No, Lily; you don't understand all that I would say. You have never known how often and how much I have thought of you; how dearly I have loved you."

"John, you must not talk of that now."

"I cannot go without telling you. When I came over here, and Mrs. Dale told me that you were to be married to that man——"

"You must not speak of Mr. Crosbie in that way," she said, turning upon him almost fiercely.

"I did not mean to say anything disrespectful of him to you. I should hate myself if I were to do so. Of course you like him better than anybody else?"

"I love him better than all the world besides."

"And so do I love you better than all the world besides." And as he spoke he got up from his seat and stood before her. "I know how poor I am, and unworthy of you; and only that you are engaged to him, I don't suppose that I should now tell you. Of course you couldn't accept such a one as me. But I have loved you ever since you remember; and now that you are going to be his wife, I cannot but tell you that it is so. You will go and live in London; but as to my seeing you there, it will be impossible. I could not go into that man's house."

"Oh, John."

"No, never; not if you became his wife. I have loved you as well as he does. When Mrs. Dale told me of it, I thought I should have fallen. I went away without seeing you because I was unable to speak to you. I made a fool of myself, and have been a fool all along. I am foolish now to tell you this, but I cannot help it."

"You will forget it all when you meet some girl that you can really love."

"And have I not really loved you? Well, never mind. I have said what I came to say, and I will now go. If it ever happens that we are down in the country together, perhaps I may see you again; but never in London. Good-by, Lily." And he put out his hand to her.

"And won't you stay for mamma?" she said.

"No. Give her my love, and to Bell. They understand all about it. They will know why I have gone. If ever you should want anybody to do anything for you, remember that I will do it, whatever it is." And as he paced away from her across the lawn, the special deed in her favour to which his mind was turned,—that one thing which he most longed to do on her behalf,—was an act of corporal chastisement upon Crosbie. If Crosbie would but ill-treat her,—ill-treat her with some antinuptial barbarity,—and if only he could be called in to avenge her wrongs! And as he

made his way back along the road towards Guestwick, he built up within his own bosom a castle in the air, for her part in which Lily Dale would by no means have thanked him.

Lily when she was left alone burst into tears. She had certainly said very little to encourage her forlorn suitor, and had so borne herself during the interview that even Crosbie could hardly have been dissatisfied; but now that Eames was gone her heart became very tender towards him. She felt that she did love him also;—not at all as she loved Crosbie, but still with a love that was tender, soft, and true. If Crosbie could have known all her thoughts at that moment, I doubt whether he would have liked them. She burst into tears, and then hurried away into some nook where she could not be seen by her mother and Bell on their return.

Eames went on his way, walking very quietly, swinging his stick and kicking through the dust, with his heart full of the scene which had just passed. He was angry with himself, thinking that he had played his part badly, accusing himself in that he had been rough to her, and selfish in the expression of his love; and he was angry with her because she had declared to him that she loved Crosbie better than all the world besides. He knew that of course she must do so;—that at any rate it was to be expected that such was the case. Yet, he thought, she might have refrained from saying so to him. "She chooses to scorn me now," he said to himself; "but the time may come when she will wish that she had scorned him." That Crosbie was wicked, bad, and selfish, he believed most fully. He felt sure that the man would ill-use her and make her wretched. He had some slight doubt whether he would marry her, and from this doubt he endeavoured to draw a scrap of comfort. If Crosbie would desert her, and if to him might be accorded the privilege of beating the man to death with his fists because of this desertion, then the world would not be quite blank for him. In

all this he was no doubt very cruel to Lily;—but then had not Lily been very cruel to him?

He was still thinking of these things when he came to the first of the Guestwick pastures. The boundary of the earl's property was very plainly marked, for with it commenced also the shady elms along the roadside, and the broad green margin of turf, grateful equally to those who walked and to those who rode. Eames had got himself on to the grass, but, in the fulness of his thoughts, was unconscious of the change in his path, when he was startled by a voice in the next field and the loud bellowing of a bull. Lord De Guest's choice cattle he knew were there, and there was one special bull which was esteemed by his lordship as of great value, and regarded as a high favourite. The people about the place declared that the beast was vicious, but Lord De Guest had often been heard to boast that it was never vicious with him. "The boys tease him, and the men are almost worse than the boys," said the earl; "but he'll never hurt any one that has not hurt him." Guided by faith in his own teaching the earl had taught himself to look upon his bull as a large, horned, innocent lamb of the flock.

As Eames paused on the road, he fancied that he recognized the earl's voice, and it was the voice of one in distress. Then the bull's roar sounded very plain in his ear, and almost close;—upon hearing which he rushed on to the gate, and, without much thinking what he was doing, vaulted over it, and advanced a few steps into the field.

"Halloo!" shouted the earl. "There's a man. Come on." And then his continued shoutings hardly formed themselves into intelligible words; but Eames plainly understood that he was invoking assistance under great pressure and stress of circumstances. The bull was making short runs at his owner, as though determined in each run to have a toss at his lordship; and at each run the earl would retreat quickly for a few paces, but he retreated always

facing his enemy, and as the animal got near to him, would make digs at his face with the long spud which he carried in his hand. But in thus making good his retreat he had been unable to keep in a direct line to the gate, and there seemed to be great danger lest the bull should succeed in pressing him up against the hedge. "Come on!" shouted the earl, who was fighting his battle manfully, but was by no means anxious to carry off all the laurels of the victory himself. "Come on, I say!" Then he stopped in his path, shouted into the bull's face, brandished his spud, and threw about his arms, thinking that he might best dismay the beast by the display of these warlike gestures.

Johnny Eames ran on gallantly to the peer's assistance, as he would have run to that of any peasant in the land. He was one to whom I should be perhaps wrong to attribute at this period of his life the gift of very high courage. He feared many things which no man should fear; but he did not fear personal mishap or injury to his own skin and bones. When Cradell escaped out of the house in Burton Crescent, making his way through the passage into the outer air, he did so because he feared that Lupex would beat him or kick him, or otherwise ill-use him. John Eames would also have desired to escape under similar circumstances; but he would have so desired because he could not endure to be looked upon in his difficulties by the people of the house, and because his imagination would have painted the horrors of a policeman dragging him off with a black eye and a torn coat. There was no one to see him now, and no policeman to take offence. Therefore he rushed to the earl's assistance, brandishing his stick, and roaring in emulation of the bull.

When the animal saw with what unfairness he was treated, and that the number of his foes was doubled, while no assistance had lent itself on his side, he stood for a while, disgusted by the injustice of humanity. He stopped, and throwing his head up to

the heavens, bellowed out his complaint. "Don't come close!" said the earl, who was almost out of breath. "Keep a little apart. Ugh! ugh! whoop, whoop!" And he threw up his arms manfully, jobbing about with his spud, ever and anon rubbing the perspiration from off his eyebrows with the back of his hand.

As the bull stood pausing, meditating whether under such circumstances flight would not be preferable to gratified passion, Eames made a rush in at him, attempting to hit him on the head. The earl, seeing this, advanced a step also, and got his spud almost up to the animal's eye. But these indignities the beast could not stand. He made a charge, bending his head first towards John Eames, and then, with that weak vacillation which is as disgraceful in a bull as in a general, he changed his purpose, and turned his horns upon his other enemy. The consequence was that his steps carried him in between the two, and that the earl and Eames found themselves for a while behind his tail.

"Now for the gate," said the earl.

"Slowly does it; slowly does it; don't run!" said Johnny, assuming in the heat of the moment a tone of counsel which would have been very foreign to him under other circumstances.

The earl was not a whit offended. "All right," said he, taking with a backward motion the direction of the gate. Then as the bull again faced towards him, he jumped from the ground, labouring painfully with arms and legs, and ever keeping his spud well advanced against the foe. Eames, holding his position a little apart from his friend, stooped low and beat the ground with his stick, and as though defying the creature. The bull felt himself defied, stood still and roared, and then made another vacillating attack.

"Hold on till we reach the gate," said Eames.

"Ugh! ugh! Whoop! whoop!" shouted the earl. And so gradually they made good their ground.

"Now get over," said Eames, when they had both reached the corner of the field in which the gate stood.

"And what'll you do?" said the earl.

"I'll go at the hedge to the right." And Johnny as he spoke dashed his stick about, so as to monopolize, for a moment the attention of the brute. The earl made a spring at the gate, and got well on to the upper rung. The bull, seeing that his prey was going, made a final rush upon the earl and struck the timber furiously with his head, knocking his lordship down on the other side. Lord De Guest was already over, but not off the rail; and thus, though he fell, he fell in safety on the sward beyond the gate. He fell in safety but utterly exhausted. Eames, as he had purposed, made a leap almost sideways at a thick hedge which divided the field from one of the Guestwick copses. There was a fairly broad ditch, and on the other side a quickset hedge, which had, however, been weakened and injured by trespassers at this corner, close to the gate. Eames was young and active and jumped well. He jumped so well that he carried his body full into the middle of the quickset, and then scrambled through to the other side, not without much injury to his clothes, and some damage also to his hands and face.

The beast, recovering from his shock against the wooden bars, looked wistfully at his last retreating enemy, as he still struggled amidst the bushes. He looked at the ditch and at the broken hedge, but he did not understand how weak were the impediments in his way. He had knocked his head against the stout timber, which was strong enough to oppose him, but was dismayed by the brambles which he might have trodden under foot without an effort. How many of us are like the bull, turning away conquered by opposition which should be as nothing to us, and breaking our feet, and worse still, our hearts, against rocks of adamant. The bull at last made up his mind that he did not dare to face the hedge; so he gave one final roar, and then turning himself round, walked placidly back amidst the herd.

Johnny made his way on to the road by a stile that

led out of the copse, and was soon standing over the earl, while the blood ran down his cheeks from the scratches. One of the legs of his trowsers had been caught by a stake, and was torn from the hip downward, and his hat was left in the field, the only trophy for the bull. "I hope you're not hurt, my lord," he said.

"Oh dear, no; but I'm terribly out of breath. Why, you're bleeding all over. He didn't get at you, did he?"

"It's only the thorns in the hedge," said Johnny, passing his hand over his face. "But I've lost my hat."

"There are plenty more hats," said the earl.

"I think I'll have a try for it," said Johnny, with whom the means of getting hats had not been so plentiful as with the earl. "He looks quiet now." And he moved towards the gate.

But Lord De Guest jumped upon his feet, and seized the young man by the collar of his coat. "Go after your hat!" said he. "You must be a fool to think of it. If you're afraid of catching cold, you shall have mine."

"I'm not the least afraid of catching cold," said Johnny. "Is he often like that, my lord?" And he made a motion with his head towards the bull.

"The gentlest creature alive; he's like a lamb generally,—just like a lamb. Perhaps he saw my red pocket-handkerchief." And Lord De Guest showed his friend that he carried such an article. "But where should I have been if you hadn't come up?"

"You'd have got to the gate, my lord."

"Yes; with my feet foremost, and four men carrying me. I'm very thirsty. You don't happen to carry a flask, do you?"

"No, my lord, I don't."

"Then we'll make the best of our way home, and have a glass of wine there." And on this occasion his lordship intended that his offer should be accepted.

CHAPTER XXII

LORD DE GUEST AT HOME

The earl and John Eames, after their escape from the bull, walked up to the Manor House together. "You can write a note to your mother, and I'll send it by one of the boys," said the earl. This was his lordship's answer when Eames declined to dine at the Manor House, because he would be expected home.

"But I'm so badly off for clothes, my lord," pleaded Johnny. "I tore my trowsers in the hedge."

"There will be nobody there beside us two and Dr. Crofts. The doctor will forgive you when he hears the story; and as for me, I didn't care if you hadn't a stitch to your back. You'll have company back to Guestwick, so come along."

Eames had no further excuse to offer, and therefore did as he was bidden. He was by no means as much at home with the earl now as during those minutes of the combat. He would rather have gone home, being somewhat ashamed of being seen in his present tattered and bare-headed condition by the servants in the house; and moreover, his mind would sometimes revert to the scene which had taken place in the garden at Allington. But he found himself obliged to obey the earl, and so he walked on with him through the woods.

The earl did not say very much, being tired and somewhat thoughtful. In what little he did say he seemed to be specially hurt by the ingratitude of the bull towards himself. "I never teased him, or annoyed him in any way."

"I suppose they are dangerous beasts?" said Eames.

"Not a bit of it, if they're properly treated. It must have been my handkerchief, I suppose. I remember that I did blow my nose."

He hardly said a word in the way of thanks to his assistant. "Where should I have been if you had not come to me?" he had exclaimed immediately after his deliverance; but having said that he didn't think it necessary to say much more to Eames. But he made himself very pleasant, and by the time he had reached the house his companion was almost glad that he had been forced to dine at the Manor House. "And now we'll have a drink," said the earl. "I don't know how you feel, but I never was so thirsty in my life."

Two servants immediately showed themselves, and evinced some surprise at Johnny's appearance. "Has the gentleman hurt hisself, my lord?" asked the butler, looking at the blood upon our friend's face.

"He has hurt his trowsers the worst, I believe," said the earl. "And if he was to put on any of mine they'd be too short and too big, wouldn't they? I am sorry you should be so uncomfortable, but you mustn't mind it for once."

"I don't mind it a bit," said Johnny.

"And I'm sure I don't," said the earl. "Mr. Eames is going to dine here, Vickers."

"Yes, my lord."

"And his hat is down in the middle of the nineteen acres. Let three or four men go for it."

"Three or four men, my lord!"

"Yes,—three or four men. There's something gone wrong with that bull. And you must get a boy with a pony to take a note into Guestwick, to Mrs. Eames. Oh dear, I'm better now," and he put down the tumbler from which he'd been drinking. "Write your note here, and then we'll go and see my pet pheasants before dinner."

Vickers and the footman knew that something had happened of much moment, for the earl was usually very particular about his dinner-table. He expected every guest who sat there to be dressed in such guise as the fashion of the day demanded; and he himself, though his morning costume was by no means

brilliant, never dined, even when alone, without having put himself into a suit of black, with a white cravat, and having exchanged the old silver hunting-watch which he carried during the day tied round his neck by a bit of old ribbon, for a small gold watch, with a chain and seals, which in the evening always dangled over his waistcoat. Dr. Gruffen had once been asked to dinner at Guestwick Manor. "Just a bachelor's chop," said the earl; "for there's nobody at home but myself." Whereupon Dr. Gruffen had come in coloured trowsers,—and had never again been asked to dine at Guestwick Manor. All this Vickers knew well; and now his lordship had brought young Eames home to dine with him with his clothes all hanging about him in a manner which Vickers declared in the servants' hall wasn't more than half decent. Therefore, they all knew that something very particular must have happened. "It's some trouble about the bull, I know," said Vickers;—"but bless you, the bull couldn't have tore his things in that way!"

Eames wrote his note, in which he told his mother that he had had an adventure with Lord De Guest, and that his lordship had insisted on bringing him home to dinner. "I have torn my trowsers all to pieces," he added in a postscript, "and have lost my hat. Everything else is all right." He was not aware that the earl also sent a short note to Mrs. Eames.

DEAR MADAM (ran the earl's note),—

Your son has, under Providence, probably saved my life. I will leave the story for him to tell. He has been good enough to accompany me home, and will return to Guestwick after dinner with Dr. Crofts, who dines here. I congratulate you on having a son with so much cool courage and good feeling.

Your very faithful servant,

DE GUEST.

Guestwick Manor,
Thursday, October, 186—

And then they went to see the pheasants. "Now, I'll tell you what," said the earl. "I advise you to take to shooting. It's the amusement of a gentleman when a man chances to have the command of game.

"But I'm always up in London."

"No, you're not. You're not up in London now. You always have your holidays. If you choose to try it, I'll see that you have shooting enough while you're here. It's better than going to sleep under the trees. Ha, ha, ha! I wonder what made you lay yourself down there. You hadn't been fighting a bull that day?"

"No, my lord. I hadn't seen the bull then."

"Well; you think of what I've been saying. When I say a thing, I mean it. You shall have shooting enough, if you have a mind to try it." Then they looked at the pheasants, and pottered about the place till the earl said it was time to dress for dinner. "That's hard upon you, isn't it?" said he. "But, at any rate, you can wash your hands, and get rid of the blood. I'll be down in the little drawing-room five minutes before seven, and I suppose I'll find you there."

At five minutes before seven Lord De Guest came into the small drawing-room, and found Johnny seated there, with a book before him. The earl was a little fussy, and showed by his manner that he was not quite at his ease, as some men do when they have any piece of work on hand which is not customary with them. He held something in his hand, and shuffled a little as he made his way up the room. He was dressed, as usual, in black; but his gold chain was not, as usual, dangling over his waistcoat.

"Eames," he said, "I want you to accept a little present from me,—just as a memorial of our affair with the bull. It will make you think of it sometimes, when I'm perhaps gone."

"Oh, my lord——"

"It's my own watch, that I have been wearing for some time; but I've got another;—two or three, I

believe, somewhere upstairs. You mustn't refuse me. I can't bear being refused. There are two or three little seals, too, which I have worn. I have taken off the one with my arms, because that's of no use to you, and it is to me. It doesn't want a key, but winds up at the handle, in this way," and the earl proceeded to explain the nature of the toy.

"My lord, you think too much of what happened to-day," said Eames, stammering.

"No, I don't; I think very little about it. I know what I think of. Put the watch in your pocket before the doctor comes. There; I hear his horse. Why didn't he drive over, and then he could have taken you back?"

"I can walk very well."

"I'll make that all right. The servant shall ride Crofts' horse, and bring back the little phaeton. How d'you do, doctor? You know Eames, I suppose? You needn't look at him in that way. His leg is not broken; it's only his trowsers." And then the earl told the story of the bull.

"Johnny will become quite a hero in town," said Crofts.

"Yes; I fear he'll get the most of the credit; and yet I was at it twice as long as he was. I'll tell you what, young men, when I got to that gate I didn't think I'd breath enough left in me to get over it. It's all very well jumping into a hedge when you're only two-and-twenty; but when a man comes to be sixty he likes to take his time about such things. Dinner ready, is it? So am I. I quite forgot that mutton chop of yours to-day, doctor. But I suppose a man may eat a good dinner after a fight with a bull?"

The evening passed by without any very pleasurable excitement, and I regret to say that the earl went fast to sleep in the drawing-room as soon as he had swallowed his cup of coffee. During dinner he had been very courteous to both his guests, but towards Eames he had used a good-humoured and almost affectionate familiarity. He had quizzed him for having been found

asleep under the tree, telling Crofts that he had looked very forlorn,—"So that I haven't a doubt about his being in love," said the earl. And he had asked Johnny to tell the name of the fair one, bringing up the remnants of his half-forgotten classicalities to bear out the joke. "If I am to take more of the severe Falernian," said he, laying his hand on the decanter of port, "I must know the lady's name. Whoever she be, I'm well sure you need not blush for her. What! you refuse to tell! Then I'll drink no more." And so the earl had walked out of the dining-room; but not till he had perceived by his guest's cheeks that the joke had been too true to be pleasant. As he went, however, he leaned with his hand on Eames's shoulder, and the servants looking on saw that the young man was to be a favourite. "He'll make him his heir," said Vickers. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if he don't make him his heir." But to this the footman objected, endeavouring to prove to Mr. Vickers that, in accordance with the law of the land, his lordship's second cousin, once removed, whom the earl had never seen, but whom he was supposed to hate, must be his heir. "A hearl can never choose his own heir, like you or me," said the footman, laying down the law. "Can't he though really, now? That's very hard on him; isn't it?" said the pretty housemaid. "Phsa," said Vickers: "you know nothing about it. My lord could make young Eames his heir to-morrow; that is, the heir of his property. He couldn't make him a hearl, because that must go to the heirs of his body. As to his leaving him the place here, I don't just know how that'd be; and I'm sure Richard don't."

"But suppose he hasn't got any heirs of his body?" asked the pretty housemaid, who was rather fond of putting down Mr. Vickers.

"He must have heirs of his body," said the butler. "Everybody has 'em. If a man don't know 'em himself, the law finds 'em out." And then Mr. Vickers walked away, avoiding further dispute.

In the meantime, the earl was asleep upstairs, and

the two young men from Guestwick did not find that they could amuse themselves with any satisfaction. Each took up a book; but there are times at which a man is quite unable to read, and when a book is only a cover for his idleness or dulness. At last, Dr. Crofts suggested, in a whisper, that they might as well begin to think of going home.

"Eh; yes; what?" said the earl: "I'm not asleep." In answer to which the doctor said that he thought he'd go home, if his lordship would let him order his horse. But the earl was again fast bound in slumber, and took no further notice of the proposition.

"Perhaps we could get off without waking him," suggested Eames, in a whisper.

"Eh; what?" said the earl. So they both resumed their books, and submitted themselves to their martyrdom for a further period of fifteen minutes. At the expiration of that time, the footman brought in tea.

"Eh, what? tea?" said the earl. "Yes, we'll have a little tea. I've heard every word you've been saying." It was that assertion on the part of the earl which always made Lady Julia so angry. "You cannot have heard what I have been saying, Theodore, because I have said nothing," she would reply. "But I should have heard it if you had," the earl would rejoin, snappishly. On the present occasion neither Crofts nor Eames contradicted him, and he took his tea and swallowed it while still three parts asleep.

"If you'll allow me, my lord, I think I'll order my horse," said the doctor.

"Yes; horse—yes—" said the earl, nodding.

"But what are you to do, Eames, if I ride?" said the doctor.

"I'll walk," whispered Eames, in his very lowest voice.

"What—what—what?" said the earl, jumping up on his feet. "Oh, ah, yes; going away, are you? I suppose you might as well, as sit here and see me sleeping. But, doctor—I didn't snore, did I?"

"Only occasionally."

"Not loud, did I? Come, Eames, did I snore loud?"

"Well, my lord, you did snore rather loud two or three times."

"Did I?" said the earl, in a voice of great disappointment. "And yet, do you know, I heard every word you said."

The small phaeton had been already ordered, and the two young men started back to Guestwick together, a servant from the house riding the doctor's horse behind them. "Look here, Eames," said the earl, as they parted on the steps of the hall door. "You're going back to town the day after to-morrow, you say, so I shan't see you again?"

"No, my lord," said Johnny.

"Look you here, now. I shall be up for the Cattle-show before Christmas. You must dine with me at my hotel, on the twenty-second of December, Pawkins's, in Jermyn Street; seven o'clock, sharp. Mind you do not forget now. Put it down in your pocket-book when you get home. Good-by, doctor; good-by. I see I must stick to that mutton chop in the middle of the day." And then they drove off.

"He'll make him his heir for certain," said Vickers to himself, as he slowly returned to his own quarters.

"You were returning from Allington, I suppose," said Crofts, "when you came across Lord De Guest and the bull?"

"Yes: I just walked over to say good-by to them."

"Did you find them all well?"

"I only saw one. The other two were out."

"Mrs. Dale, was it?"

"No; it was Lily."

"Sitting alone, thinking of her fine London lover, of course? I suppose we ought to look upon her as a very lucky girl. I have no doubt she thinks herself so."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Johnny.

"I believe he's a very good young man," said the doctor; "but I can't say I quite liked his manner."

"I should think not," said Johnny.

"But then in all probability he did not like mine a bit better, or perhaps yours either. And if so it's all fair."

"I don't see that it's a bit fair. He's a snob," said Eames; "and I don't believe that I am." He had taken a glass or two of the earl's "severe Falernian," and was disposed to a more generous confidence, and perhaps also to stronger language, than might otherwise have been the case.

"No; I don't think he is a snob," said Crofts. "Had he been so, Mrs. Dale would have perceived it."

"You'll see," said Johnny, touching up the earl's horse with energy as he spoke. "You'll see. A man who gives himself airs is a snob; and he gives himself airs. And I don't believe he's a straightforward fellow. It was a bad day for us all when he came among them at Allington."

"I can't say that I see that."

"I do. But mind, I haven't spoken a word of this to any one. And I don't mean. What would be the good? I suppose she must marry him now?"

"Of course she must."

"And be wretched all her life. Oh-h-h-h!" and he muttered a deep groan. "I'll tell you what it is, Crofts. He is going to take the sweetest girl out of this country that ever was in it, and he don't deserve her."

"I don't think she can be compared to her sister," said Crofts slowly.

"What; not Lily?" said Eames, as though the proposition made by the doctor were one that could not hold water for a minute.

"I have always thought that Bell was the more admired of the two," said Crofts.

"I'll tell you what," said Eames. "I have never yet set my eyes on any human creature whom I thought so beautiful as Lily Dale. And now that beast is going to marry her! I'll tell you what, Crofts; I'll manage

to pick a quarrel with him yet." Whereupon the doctor, seeing the nature of the complaint from which his companion was suffering, said nothing more, either about Lily or about Bell.

Soon after this Eames was at his own door, and was received there by his mother and sister with all the enthusiasm due to a hero. "He has saved the earl's life!" Mrs. Eames had exclaimed to her daughter on reading Lord De Guest's note. "Oh, goodness!" and she threw herself back upon the sofa almost in a fainting condition.

"Saved Lord De Guest's life!" said Mary.

"Yes—under Providence," said Mrs. Eames, as though that latter fact added much to her son's good deed.

"But how did he do it?"

"By cool courage and good feeling—so his lordship says. But I wonder how he really did do it?"

"Whatever way it was, he's torn all his clothes and lost his hat," said Mary.

"I don't care a bit about that," said Mrs. Eames. "I wonder whether the earl has any interest at the Income-tax. What a thing it would be if he could get Johnny a step. It would be seventy pounds a year at once. He was quite right to stay and dine when his lordship asked him. And so Dr. Crofts is there. It couldn't have been anything in the doctoring way, I suppose."

"No, I should say not; because of what he says of his trowsers." And so the two ladies were obliged to wait for John's return.

"How did you do it, John?" said his mother, embracing him, as soon as the door was opened.

"How did you save the earl's life?" said Mary, who was standing behind her mother.

"Would his lordship really have been killed, if it had not been for you?" asked Mrs. Eames.

"And was he very much hurt?" asked Mary.

"Oh, bother," said Johnny, on whom the results of the day's work, together with the earl's Falernian,

had made some still remaining impression. On ordinary occasions, Mrs. Eames would have felt hurt at being so answered by her son; but at the present moment she regarded him as standing so high in general favour that she took no offence. "Oh, Johnny, do tell us. Of course we must be very anxious to know it all."

"There's nothing to tell, except that a bull ran at the earl, as I was going by; so I went into the field and helped him, and then he made me stay and dine with him."

"But his lordship says that you saved his life," said Mary.

"Under Providence," added their mother.

"At any rate, he has given me a gold watch and chain," said Johnny, drawing the present out of his pocket. "I wanted a watch badly. All the same, I didn't like taking it."

"It would have been very wrong to refuse," said his mother. "And I am so glad you have been so fortunate. And look here, Johnny: when a friend like that comes in your way, don't turn your back on him." Then, at last, he thawed beneath their kindness, and told them the whole of the story. I fear that, in recounting the earl's efforts with the spud, he hardly spoke of his patron with all that deference which would have been appropriate.

CHAPTER XXIII

MR. PLANTAGENET PALLISER

A WEEK passed over Mr. Crosbie's head at Courcy Castle without much inconvenience to him from the well-known fact of his matrimonial engagement. Both George De Courcy and John De Courcy had in their different ways charged him with his offence, and endeavoured to annoy him by recurring to the subject;

but he did not care much for the wit or malice of George or John De Courcy. The countess had hardly alluded to Lily Dale after those few words which she said on the first day of his visit, and seemed perfectly willing to regard his doings at Allington as the occupation natural to a young man in such a position. He had been seduced down to a dull country house, and had, as a matter of course, taken to such amusements as the place afforded. He had shot the partridges and made love to the young lady, taking those little recreations as compensation for the tedium of the squire's society. Perhaps he had gone a little too far with the young lady; but then no one knew better than the countess how difficult it is for a young man to go far enough without going too far. It was not her business to make herself a censor on a young man's conduct. The blame, no doubt, rested quite as much with Miss Dale as with him. She was quite sorry that any young lady should be disappointed; but if girls will be imprudent, and set their caps at men above their mark, they must encounter disappointment. With such language did Lady De Courcy speak of the affair among her daughters, and her daughters altogether agreed with her that it was out of the question that Mr. Crosbie should marry Lily Dale. From Alexandrina he encountered during the week none of that raillery which he had expected. He had promised to explain to her before he left the castle all the circumstances of his acquaintance with Lily, and she at last showed herself determined to demand the fulfilment of this promise; but, previous to that, she said nothing to manifest either offence or a lessened friendship. And I regret to say, that in the intercourse which had taken place between them, that friendship was by no means less tender than it had been in London.

"And when will you tell me what you promised?" she asked him one afternoon, speaking in a low voice, as they were standing together at the window of the billiard-room, in that idle half-hour which always occurs before the necessity for dinner preparation has

come. She had been riding and was still in her habit, and he had returned from shooting. She knew that she looked more than ordinarily well in her tall straight hat and riding gear, and was wont to hang about the house, walking skilfully with her upheld drapery, during this period of the day. It was dusk, but not dark, and there was no artificial light in the billiard-room. There had been some pretence of knocking about the balls, but it had been only pretence. "Even Diana," she had said, "could not have played billiards in a habit." Then she had put down her mace, and they had stood talking together in the recess of a large bow-window.

"And what did I promise?" said Crosbie.

"You know well enough. Not that it is a matter of any special interest to me; only, as you undertook to promise, of course my curiosity has been raised."

"If it be of no special interest," said Crosbie, "you will not object to absolve me from my promise."

"That is just like you," she said. "And how false you men always are. You made up your mind to buy my silence on a distasteful subject by pretending to offer me your future confidence; and now you tell me that you do not mean to confide in me."

"You begin by telling me that the matter is one that does not in the least interest you."

"That is so false again! You know very well what I meant. Do you remember what you said to me the day you came? and am I not bound to tell you after that, that your marriage with this or that young lady is not matter of special interest to me? Still, as your friend——"

"Well, as my friend!"

"I shall be glad to know—— But I am not going to beg for your confidence; only I tell you this fairly, that no man is so mean in my eyes as a man who fights under false colours."

"And am I fighting under false colours?"

"Yes, you are." And now, as she spoke, the Lady

Alexandrina blushed beneath her hat; and dull as was the remaining light of the evening, Crosbie, looking into her face, saw her heightened colour. "Yes, you are. A gentleman is fighting under false colours who comes into a house like this, with a public rumour of his being engaged, and then conducts himself as though nothing of the kind existed. Of course, it is not anything to me specially; but that is fighting under false colours. Now, sir, you may redeem the promise you made me when you first came here,—or you may let it alone."

It must be acknowledged that the lady was fighting her battle with much courage, and also with some skill. In three or four days Crosbie would be gone; and this victory, if it were ever to be gained, must be gained in those three or four days. And if there were to be no victory, then it would be only fair that Crosbie should be punished for his duplicity, and that she should be avenged as far as any revenge might be in her power. Not that she meditated any deep revenge, or was prepared to feel any strong anger. She liked Crosbie as well as she had ever liked any man. She believed that he liked her also. She had no conception of any very strong passion, but conceived that a married life was more pleasant than one of single bliss. She had no doubt that he had promised to make Lily Dale his wife, but so had he previously promised her, or nearly so. It was a fair game, and she would win it if she could. If she failed, she would show her anger; but she would show it in a mild, weak manner,—turning up her nose at Lily before Crosbie's face, and saying little things against himself behind his back. Her wrath would not carry her much beyond that.

"Now, sir, you may redeem the promise you made me when you first came here,—or you may let it alone." So she spoke, and then she turned her face away from him, gazing out into the darkness.

"Alexandrina!" he said.

"Well, sir? But you have no right to speak to me

in that style. You know that you have no right to call me by my name in that way!"

"You mean that you insist upon your title?"

"All ladies insist on what you call their title, from gentlemen, except under the privilege of greater intimacy than you have the right to claim. You did not call Miss Dale by her Christian name till you had obtained permission, I suppose?"

"You used to let me call you so."

"Never! Once or twice, when you have done so, I have not forbidden it, as I should have done. Very well, sir, as you have nothing to tell me, I will leave you. I must confess that I did not think you were such a coward." And she prepared to go, gathering up the skirts of her habit, and taking up the whip which she had laid on the window-sill.

"Stay a moment, Alexandrina," he said; "I am not happy, and you should not say words intended to make me more miserable."

"And why are you unhappy?"

"Because—— I will tell you instantly, if I may believe that I am telling you only, and not the whole household."

"Of course I shall not talk of it to others. Do you think that I cannot keep a secret?"

"It is because I have promised to marry one woman, and because I love another. I have told you everything now; and if you choose to say again that I am fighting under false colours I will leave the castle before you can see me again."

"Mr. Crosbie!"

"Now you know it all, and may imagine whether or no I am very happy. I think you said it was time to dress;—suppose we go?" And without further speech the two went off to their separate rooms.

Crosbie, as soon as he was alone in his chamber, sat himself down in his arm-chair, and went to work striving to make up his mind as to his future conduct. It must not be supposed that the declaration just made by him had been produced solely by his difficulty at

the moment. The atmosphere of Courcy Castle had been at work upon him for the last week past. And every word that he had heard, and every word that he had spoken, had tended to destroy all that was good and true within him, and to foster all that was selfish and false. He had said to himself a dozen times during that week that he never could be happy with Lily Dale, and that he never could make her happy. And then he had used the old sophistry in his endeavour to teach himself that it was right to do that which he wished to do. Would it not be better for Lily that he should desert her, than marry her against the dictates of his own heart? And if he really did not love her, would he not be committing a greater crime in marrying her than in deserting her? He confessed to himself that he had been very wrong in allowing the outer world to get such a hold upon him, that the love of a pure girl like Lily could not suffice for his happiness. But there was the fact, and he found himself unable to contend against it. If by any absolute self-sacrifice he could secure Lily's well-being, he would not hesitate for a moment. But would it be well to sacrifice her as well as himself?

He had discussed the matter in this way within his own breast, till he had almost taught himself to believe that it was his duty to break off his engagement with Lily; and he had also almost taught himself to believe that a marriage with a daughter of the house of Courcy would satisfy his ambition and assist him in his battle with the world. That Lady Alexandrina would accept him he felt certain, if he could only induce her to forgive him for his sin in becoming engaged to Miss Dale. How very prone she would be to forgiveness in this matter, he had not divined, having not as yet learned how easily such a woman can forgive such a sin, if the ultimate triumph be accorded to herself.

And there was another reason which operated much with Crosbie, urging him on in his present mood and wishes, though it should have given an exactly

opposite impulse to his heart. He had hesitated as to marrying Lily Dale at once, because of the smallness of his income. Now he had a prospect of considerable increase to that income. One of the commissioners at his office had been promoted to some greater commissionership, and it was understood by everybody that the secretary at the General Committee Office would be the new commissioner. As to that there was no doubt. But then the question had arisen as to the place of secretary. Crosbie had received two or three letters on the subject, and it seemed that the likelihood of his obtaining this step in the world was by no means slight. It would increase his official income from seven hundred a year to twelve, and would place him altogether above the world. His friend, the present secretary, had written to him, assuring him that no other probable competitor was spoken of as being in the field against him. If such good fortune awaited him, would it not smooth any present difficulty which lay in the way of his mariage with Lily Dale? But, alas, he had not looked at the matter in that light! Might not the countess help him to this preferment? And if his destiny intended for him the good things of this world,—secretaryships, commissionerships, chairmanships and such like, would it not be well that he should struggle on in his upward path by such assistance as good connections might give him?

He sat thinking over it all in his own room on that evening. He had written twice to Lily since his arrival at Courcy Castle. His first letter has been given. His second was written much in the same tone; though Lily, as she had read it, had unconsciously felt somewhat less satisfied than she had been with the first. Expressions of love were not wanting, but they were vague and without heartiness. They savoured of insincerity, though there was nothing in the words themselves to convict them. Few liars can lie with the full roundness and self-sufficiency of truth;

and Crosbie, bad as he was, had not yet become bad enough to reach that perfection. He had said nothing to Lily of the hopes of promotion which had been opened to him; but he had again spoken of his own worldliness—acknowledging that he received an unsatisfying satisfaction from the pomps and vanities of Courcy Castle. In fact he was paving the way for that which he had almost resolved that he would do, now he had told Lady Alexandrina that he loved her; and he was obliged to confess to himself that the die was cast.

As he thought of all this, there was not wanting to him some of the satisfaction of an escape. Soon after making that declaration of love at Allington he had begun to feel that in making it he had cut his throat. He had endeavoured to persuade himself that he could live comfortably with his throat cut in that way; and as long as Lily was with him he would believe that he could do so; but as soon as he was again alone he would again accuse himself of suicide. This was his frame of mind even while he was yet at Allington, and his ideas on the subject had become stronger during his sojourn at Courcy. But the self-immolation had not been completed, and he now began to think that he could save himself. I need hardly say that this was not all triumph to him. Even had there been no material difficulty as to his desertion of Lily,—no uncle, cousin, and mother whose anger he must face,—no vision of a pale face, more eloquent of wrong in its silence than even uncle, cousin, and mother, with their indignant storm of words,—he was not altogether heartless. How should he tell all this to the girl who had loved him so well; who had so loved him, that, as he himself felt, her love would fashion all her future life either for weal or for woe? "I am unworthy of her, and will tell her so," he said to himself. How many a false hound of a man has endeavoured to salve his own conscience by such mock humility? But he acknowledged at this moment, as he rose from his seat to dress himself,

that the die was cast, and that it was open to him now to say what he pleased to Lady Alexandrina. "Others have gone through the same fire before," he said to himself, as he walked downstairs, "and have come out scathless." And then he recalled to himself the names of various men of high repute in the world who were supposed to have committed in their younger days some such little mistake as that into which he had been betrayed.

In passing through the hall he overtook Lady Julia De Guest, and was in time to open for her the door of the drawing-room. He then remembered that she had come into the billiard-room at one side, and had gone out at the other, while he was standing with Alexandrina at the window. He had not, however, then thought much of Lady Julia; and as he now stood for her to pass by him through the door-way, he made to her some indifferent remark.

But Lady Julia was on some subjects a stern woman, and not without a certain amount of courage. In the last week she had seen what had been going on, and had become more and more angry. Though she had disowned any family connection with Lily Dale, nevertheless she now felt for her sympathy and almost affection. Nearly every day she had repeated stiffly to the countess some incident of Crosbie's courtship and engagement to Miss Dale,—speaking of it as with absolute knowledge, as a thing settled at all points. This she had done to the countess alone, in the presence of the countess and Alexandrina, and also before all the female guests of the castle. But what she had said was received simply with an incredulous smile. "Dear me! Lady Julia," the countess had replied at last, "I shall begin to think you are in love with Mr. Crosbie yourself; you harp so constantly on this affair of his. One would think that young ladies in your part of the world must find it very difficult to get husbands, seeing that the success of one young lady is trumpeted so loudly." For the moment, Lady Julia was silenced; but it was not

easy to silence her altogether when she had a subject for speech near her heart.

Almost all the Courcy world were assembled in the drawing-room as she now walked into the room with Crosbie at her heels. When she found herself near the crowd she turned round, and addressed him in a voice more audible than that generally required for purposes of drawing-room conversation. "Mr. Crosbie," she said, "have you heard lately from our dear friend, Lily Dale?" And she looked him full in the face, in a manner more significant, probably, than even she had intended it to be. There was, at once, a general hush in the room, and all eyes were turned upon her and upon him.

Crosbie instantly made an effort to bear the attack gallantly, but he felt that he could not quite command his colour, or prevent a sudden drop of perspiration from showing itself upon his brow. "I had a letter from Allington yesterday," he said. "I suppose you have heard of your brother's encounter with the bull?"

"The bull!" said Lady Julia. And it was instantly manifest to all that her attack had been foiled and her flank turned.

"Good gracious! Lady Julia, how very odd you are!" said the countess.

"But what about the bull?" asked the Honourable George.

"It seems that the earl was knocked down in the middle of one of his own fields."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Alexandrina. And sundry other exclamations were made by all the assembled ladies.

"But he wasn't hurt," said Crosbie. "A young man named Eames seems to have fallen from the sky and carried off the earl on his back."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" growled the other earl, as he heard of the discomfiture of his brother peer.

Lady Julia, who had received her own letters that day from Guestwick, knew that nothing of importance had happened to her brother; but she felt that she was foiled for that time.

"I hope that there has not really been any accident," said Mr. Gazebee, with a voice of great solicitude.

"My brother was quite well last night, thank you," said she. And then the little groups again formed themselves, and Lady Julia was left alone on the corner of a sofa.

"Was that all an invention of yours, sir?" said Alexandrina to Crosbie.

"Not quite. I did get a letter this morning from my friend Bernard Dale,—that old harridan's nephew; and Lord De Guest has been worried by some of his animals. I wish I had told her that his stupid old neck had been broken."

"Fie, Mr. Crosbie!"

"What business has she to interfere with me?"

"But I mean to ask the same question that she asked, and you won't put me off with a cock-and-bull story like that." But then, as she was going to ask the question, dinner was announced.

"And is it true that De Guest has been tossed by a bull?" said the earl, as soon as the ladies were gone. He had spoken nothing during dinner except what words he had muttered into the ear of Lady Dumbello. It was seldom that conversation had many charms for him in his own house; but there was a savour of pleasantry in the idea of Lord De Guest having been tossed, by which even he was tickled.

"Only knocked down, I believe," said Crosbie.

"Ha, ha, ha!" growled the earl; then he filled his glass, and allowed some one else to pass the bottle. Poor man! There was not much left to him now in the world which did amuse him.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," said Plantagenet Palliser, who was sitting at the earl's right hand, opposite to Lord Dumbello.

"Don't you?" said the earl. "Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll be shot if I do. From all I hear De Guest is an uncommon good farmer. And I don't see the joke of tossing a farmer merely because he's a nobleman also. Do you?" and he turned round to

Mr. Gazebee, who was sitting on the other side. The earl was an earl, and was also Mr. Gazebee's father-in-law. Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was the heir to a dukedom. Therefore, Mr. Gazebee merely simpered, and did not answer the question put to him. Mr. Palliser said nothing more about it, nor did the earl; and then the joke died away.

Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was the Duke of Omnium's heir—heir to that nobleman's title and to his enormous wealth; and, therefore, was a man of mark in the world. He sat in the House of Commons, of course. He was about five-and-twenty years of age, and was, as yet, unmarried. He did not hunt or shoot or keep a yacht, and had been heard to say that he had never put a foot upon a race-course in his life. He dressed very quietly, never changing the colour or form of his garments; and in society was quiet, reserved, and very often silent. He was tall, slight, and not ill-looking; but more than this cannot be said for his personal appearance—except, indeed, this, that no one could mistake him for other than a gentleman. With his uncle, the duke, he was on good terms—that is to say, they had never quarrelled. A very liberal allowance had been made to the nephew; but the two relatives had no tastes in common, and did not often meet. Once a year Mr. Palliser visited the duke at his great country seat for two or three days, and usually dined with him two or three times during the season in London. Mr. Palliser sat for a borough which was absolutely under the duke's command; but had accepted his seat under the distinct understanding that he was to take whatever part in politics might seem good to himself. Under these well-understood arrangements, the duke and his heir showed to the world quite a pattern of a happy family. "So different to the earl and Lord Porlock!" the people of West Barsetshire used to say. For the estates, both of the duke and of the earl, were situated in the western division of that county.

Mr. Palliser was chiefly known to the world as a

rising politician. We may say that he had everything at his command, in the way of pleasure, that the world could offer him. He had wealth, position, power, and the certainty of attaining the highest rank among, perhaps, the most brilliant nobility of the world. He was courted by all who could get near enough to court him. It is hardly too much to say that he might have selected a bride from all that was most beautiful and best among English women. If he would have bought race-horses, and have expended thousands on the turf, he would have gratified his uncle by doing so. He might have been the master of hounds, or the slaughterer of hecatombs of birds. But to none of these things would he devote himself. He had chosen to be a politician, and in that pursuit he laboured with a zeal and perseverance which would have made his fortune at any profession or in any trade. He was constant in committee-rooms up to the very middle of August. He was rarely absent from any debate of importance, and never from any important division. Though he seldom spoke, he was always ready to speak if his purpose required it. No man gave him credit for any great genius—few even considered that he could become either an orator or a mighty statesman. But the world said that he was a rising man, and old Nestor of the Cabinet looked on him as one who would be able, at some far future day, to come among them as a younger brother. Hitherto he had declined such inferior offices as had been offered to him, biding his time carefully; and he was as yet tied hand and neck to no party, though known to be liberal in all his political tendencies. He was a great reader—not taking up a book here, and another there, as chance brought books before him, but working through an enormous course of books, getting up the great subject of the world's history—filling himself full of facts—though perhaps not destined to acquire the power of using those facts otherwise than as precedents. He strove also diligently to become a

linguist—not without success, as far as a competent understanding of various languages. He was a thin-minded, plodding, respectable man, willing to devote all his youth to work, in order that in old age he might be allowed to sit among the Councillors of the State.

Hitherto his name had not been coupled by the world with that of any woman whom he had been supposed to admire; but latterly it had been observed that he had often been seen in the same room with Lady Dumbello. It had hardly amounted to more than this; but when it was remembered how undemonstrative were the two persons concerned—how little disposed was either of them to any strong display of feeling—even this was thought matter to be mentioned. He certainly would speak to her from time to time almost with an air of interest; and Lady Dumbello, when she saw that he was in the room, would be observed to raise her head with some little show of life, and to look round as though there were something there on which it might be worth her while to allow her eyes to rest. When such innuendoes were abroad, no one would probably make more of them than Lady De Courcy. Many, when they heard that Mr. Palliser was to be at the castle, had expressed their surprise at her success in that quarter. Others, when they learned that Lady Dumbello had consented to become her guest, had also wondered greatly. But when it was ascertained that the two were to be there together, her good-natured friends had acknowledged that she was a very clever woman. To have either Mr. Palliser or Lady Dumbello would have been a feather in her cap; but to succeed in getting both, by enabling each to know that the other would be there, was indeed a triumph. As regards Lady Dumbello, however, the bargain was not fairly carried out; for, after all, Mr. Palliser came to Courcy Castle only for two nights and a day, and during the whole of that day he was closeted with sundry large blue-books. As for Lady De Courcy, she did not care

how he might be employed. Blue-books and Lady Dumbello were all the same to her. Mr. Palliser had been at Courcy Castle, and neither enemy nor friend could deny the fact.

This was his second evening; and as he had promised to meet his constituents at Silverbridge at one p.m. on the following day, with the view of explaining to them his own conduct and the political position of the world in general; and as he was not to return from Silverbridge to Courcy, Lady Dumbello, if she made any way at all, must take advantage of the short gleam of sunshine which the present hour afforded her. No one, however, could say that she showed any active disposition to monopolize Mr. Palliser's attention. When he sauntered into the drawing-room she was sitting, alone, in a large, low chair, made without arms, so as to admit the full expansion of her dress, but hollowed and round at the back, so as to afford her the support that was necessary to her. She had barely spoken three words since she had left the dining-room, but the time had not passed heavily with her. Lady Julia had again attacked the countess about Lily Dale and Mr. Crosbie, and Alexandrina, driven almost to rage, had stalked off to the farther end of the room, not concealing her special concern in the matter.

"How I do wish they were married and done with," said the countess; "and then we should hear no more about them."

All of which Lady Dumbello heard and understood; and in all of it she took a certain interest. She remembered such things, learning thereby who was who, and regulating her own conduct by what she learned. She was by no means idle at this or at other such times, going through, we may say, a considerable amount of really hard work in her manner of working. There she had sat speechless, unless when acknowledging by a low word of assent some expression of flattery from those around her. Then the door opened, and when Mr. Palliser entered she raised her head, and the faintest possible gleam of satisfaction might have

been discerned upon her features. But she made no attempt to speak to him; and when, as he stood at the table, he took up a book and remained thus standing for a quarter of an hour, she neither showed nor felt any impatience. After that Lord Dumbello came in, and he stood at the table without a book. Even then Lady Dumbello felt no impatience.

Plantagenet Palliser skimmed through his little book, and probably learned something. When he put it down he sipped a cup of tea, and remarked to Lady De Courcy that he believed it was only twelve miles to Silverbridge.

"I wish it was a hundred and twelve," said the countess.

"In that case I should be forced to start to-night," said Mr. Palliser.

"Then I wish it was a thousand and twelve," said Lady De Courcy.

"In that case I should not have come at all," said Mr. Palliser. He did not mean to be uncivil, and had only stated a fact.

"The young men are becoming absolute bears," said the countess to her daughter Margaretta.

He had been in the room nearly an hour when he did at last find himself standing close to Lady Dumbello: close to her, and without any other very near neighbour.

"I should hardly have expected to find you here," he said.

"Nor I you," she answered.

"Though, for the matter of that, we are both near our own homes."

"I am not near mine."

"I meant Plumstead; your father's place."

"Yes; that was my home once."

"I wish I could show you my uncle's place. The castle is very fine, and he has some good pictures."

"So I have heard."

"Do you stay here long?"

"Oh, no. I go to Cheshire the day after to-morrow.

Lord Dumbello is always there when the hunting begins."

"Ah, yes; of course. What a happy fellow he is; never any work to do! His constituents never trouble him, I suppose?"

"I don't think they ever do, much."

After that Mr. Palliser sauntered away again, and Lady Dumbello passed the rest of the evening in silence. It is to be hoped that they both were rewarded by that ten minutes of sympathetic intercourse for the inconvenience which they had suffered in coming to Courcy Castle.

But that which seems so innocent to us had been looked on in a different light by the stern moralists of that house.

"By Jove!" said the Honourable George to his cousin, Mr. Gresham, "I wonder how Dumbello likes it."

"It seems to me that Dumbello takes it very easily."

"There are some men who will take anything easily," said George, who, since his own marriage, had learned to have a holy horror of such wicked things.

"She's beginning to come out a little," said Lady Clandidlem to Lady De Courcy, when the two old women found themselves together over a fire in some back sitting-room. "Still waters always run deep, you know."

"I shouldn't at all wonder if she were to go off with him," said Lady De Courcy.

"He'll never be such a fool as that," said Lady Clandidlem.

"I believe men will be fools enough for anything," said Lady De Courcy. "But, of course, if he did, it would come to nothing afterwards. I know one who would not be sorry. If ever a man was tired of a woman, Lord Dumbello is tired of her."

But in this, as in almost everything else, the wicked old woman spoke scandal. Lord Dumbello was still proud of his wife, and as fond of her as a man can be of a woman whose fondness depends upon mere pride.

There had not been much that was dangerous in the conversation between Mr. Palliser and Lady Dumbello, but I cannot say the same as to that which was going on at the same moment between Crosbie and Lady Alexandrina. She, as I have said, walked away in almost open dudgeon when Lady Julia recommenced her attack about poor Lily, nor did she return to the general circle during the evening. There were two large drawing-rooms at Courcy Castle, joined together by a narrow link of a room, which might have been called a passage, had it not been lighted by two windows coming down to the floor, carpeted as were the drawing-rooms, and warmed with a separate fireplace. Hither she betook herself, and was soon followed by her married sister Amelia.

"That woman almost drives me mad," said Alexandrina, as they stood together with their toes upon the fender.

"But, my dear, you of all people should not allow yourself to be driven mad on such a subject."

"That's all very well, Amelia."

"The question is this, my dear,—what does Mr. Crosbie mean to do?"

"How should I know?"

"If you don't know, it will be safer to suppose that he is going to marry this girl; and in that case——"

"Well, what in that case? Are you going to be another Lady Julia? What do I care about the girl?"

"I don't suppose you care much about the girl; and if you care as little about Mr. Crosbie, there's an end of it; only in that case, Alexandrina——"

"Well, what in that case?"

"You know I don't want to preach to you. Can't you tell me at once whether you really like him? You and I have always been good friends." And the married sister put her arm affectionately round the waist of her who wished to be married.

"I like him well enough."

"And has he made any declaration to you?"

"In a sort of way he has. Hark, here he is!" And

Crosbie, coming in from the larger room, joined the sisters at the fireplace.

"We were driven away by the clack of Lady Julia's tongue," said the elder.

"I never met such a woman," said Crosbie.

"There cannot well be many like her," said Alexandrina. And after that they all stood silent for a minute or two. Lady Amelia Gazebee was considering whether or no she would do well to go and leave the two together. If it were intended that Mr. Crosbie should marry her sister, it would certainly be well to give him an opportunity of expressing such a wish on his own part. But if Alexandrina was simply making a fool of herself, then it would be well for her to stay. "I suppose she would rather I should go," said the elder sister to herself; and then, obeying the rule which should guide all our actions from one to another, she went back and joined the crowd.

"Will you come on into the other room?" said Crosbie.

"I think we are very well here," Alexandrina replied.

"But I wish to speak to you,—particularly," said he.

"And cannot you speak here?"

"No. They will be passing backwards and forwards." Lady Alexandrina said nothing further, but led the way into the other large room. That also was lighted, and there were in it four or five persons. Lady Rosina was reading a work on the millennium, with a light to herself in one corner. Her brother John was asleep in an arm-chair, and a young gentleman and lady were playing chess. There was, however, ample room for Crosbie and Alexandrina to take up a position apart.

"And now, Mr. Crosbie, what have you got to say to me? But, first, I mean to repeat Lady Julia's question, as I told you that I should do.—When did you hear last from Miss Dale?"

"It is cruel in you to ask me such a question, after what I have already told you. You know that I have given to Miss Dale a promise of marriage."

"Very well, sir. I don't see why you should bring me in here to tell me anything that is so publicly known as that. With such a herald as Lady Julia it was quite unnecessary."

"If you can only answer me in that tone I will make an end of it at once. When I told you of my engagement, I told you also that another woman possessed my heart. Am I wrong to suppose that you knew to whom I alluded?"

"Indeed, I did not, Mr. Crosbie. I am no conjurer, and I have not scrutinized you so closely as your friend Lady Julia."

"It is you that I love. I am sure I need hardly say so now."

"Hardly, indeed,—considering that you are engaged to Miss Dale."

"As to that I have, of course, to own that I have behaved foolishly;—worse than foolishly, if you choose to say so. You cannot condemn me more absolutely than I condemn myself. But I have made up my mind as to one thing. I will not marry where I do not love." Oh, if Lily could have heard him as he then spoke! "It would be impossible for me to speak in terms too high of Miss Dale; but I am quite sure that I could not make her happy as her husband."

"Why did you not think of that before you asked her?" said Alexandrina. But there was very little of condemnation in her tone.

"I ought to have done so; but it is hardly for you to blame me with severity. Had you, when we were last together in London—had you been less——"

"Less what?"

"Less defiant," said Crosbie, "all this might perhaps have been avoided."

Lady Alexandrina could not remember that she had been defiant; but, however, she let that pass. "Oh, yes; of course it was my fault."

"I went down there to Allington with my heart ill at ease, and now I have fallen into this trouble. I tell you all as it has happened. It is impossible that I

should marry Miss Dale. It would be wicked in me to do so, seeing that my heart belongs altogether to another. I have told you who is that other; and now may I hope for an answer?"

"An answer to what?"

"Alexandrina, will you be my wife?"

If it had been her object to bring him to a point-blank declaration and proposition of marriage, she had certainly achieved her object now. And she had that trust in her own power of management and in her mother's, that she did not fear that in accepting him she would incur the risk of being served as he was serving Lily Dale. She knew her own position and his too well for that. If she accepted him she would in due course of time become his wife,—let Miss Dale and all her friends say what they might to the contrary. As to that head she had no fear. But nevertheless she did not accept him at once. Though she wished for the prize, her woman's nature hindered her from taking it when it was offered to her.

"How long is it, Mr. Crosbie," she said, "since you put the same question to Miss Dale?"

"I have told you everything, Alexandrina,—as I promised that I would do. If you intend to punish me for doing so——"

"And I might ask another question. How long will it be before you put the same question to some other girl?"

He turned round as though to walk away from her in anger; but when he had gone half the distance to the door he returned.

"By heaven!" he said, and he spoke somewhat roughly, too, "I'll have an answer. You at any rate have nothing with which to reproach me. All that I have done wrong, I have done through you, or on your behalf. You have heard my proposal. Do you intend to accept it?"

"I declare you startle me. If you demanded my money or my life, you could not be more imperious."

"Certainly not more resolute in my determination."

"And if I decline the honour?"

"I shall think you the most fickle of your sex."

"And if I were to accept it?"

"I would swear that you were the best, the dearest, and the sweetest of women."

"I would rather have your good opinion than your bad, certainly," said Lady Alexandrina. And then it was understood by both of them that that affair was settled. Whenever she was called on in future to speak of Lily, she always called her, "that poor Miss Dale"; but she never again spoke a word of reproach to her future lord about that little adventure. "I shall tell mamma to-night," she said to him, as she bade him good-night in some sequestered nook to which they had betaken themselves. Lady Julia's eye was again on them as they came out from the sequestered nook, but Alexandrina no longer cared for Lady Julia.

"George, I cannot quite understand about that Mr. Palliser. Isn't he to be a duke, and oughtn't he to be a lord now?" This question was asked by Mrs. George De Courcy of her husband, when they found themselves together in the seclusion of the nuptial chamber.

"Yes; he'll be Duke of Omnium when the old fellow dies. I think he's one of the slowest fellows I ever came across. He'll take deuced good care of the property, though."

"But, George, do explain it to me. It is so stupid not to understand, and I am afraid of opening my mouth for fear of blundering."

"Then keep your mouth shut, my dear. You'll learn all those sort of things in time, and nobody notices it if you don't say anything."

"Yes, but George;—I don't like to sit silent all the night. I'd sooner be up here with a novel if I can't speak about anything."

"Look at Lady Dumbello. She doesn't want to be always talking."

"Lady Dumbello is very different from me. But do tell me, who is Mr. Palliser?"

"He's the duke's nephew. If he were the duke's son, he would be the Marquis of Silverbridge."

"And will he be plain Mister till his uncle dies?"

"Yes, a very plain Mister."

"What a pity for him. But, George,—if I have a baby, and if he should be a boy, and if——"

"Oh, nonsense; it will be time enough to talk of that when he comes. I'm going to sleep."

CHAPTER XXIV

A MOTHER-IN-LAW AND A FATHER-IN-LAW

On the following morning Mr. Plantagenet Palliser was off upon his political mission before breakfast;—either that, or else some private comfort was afforded to him in guise of solitary rolls and coffee. The public breakfast at Courcy Castle was going on at eleven o'clock, and at that hour Mr. Palliser was already closeted with the Mayor of Silverbridge.

"I must get off by the 3.45 train," said Mr. Palliser. "Who is there to speak after me?"

"Well, I shall say a few words; and Growdy,—he'll expect them to listen to him. Growdy has always stood very firm by his grace, Mr. Palliser."

"Mind we are in the room sharp at one. And you can have a fly, for me to get away to the station, ready in the yard. I won't go a moment before I can help. I shall be just an hour and a half myself. No, thank you, I never take any wine in the morning." And I may here state that Mr. Palliser did get away by the 3.45 train, leaving Mr. Growdy still talking on the platform. Constituents must be treated with respect; but time has become so scarce now-a-days that that respect has to be meted out by the quarter of an hour with parsimonious care.

In the meantime there was more leisure at Courcy Castle. Neither the countess nor Lady Alexandrina came down to breakfast, but their absence gave rise

to no special remark. Breakfast at the castle was a morning meal at which people showed themselves, or did not show themselves, as it pleased them. Lady Julia was there looking very glum, and Crosbie was sitting next to his future sister-in-law Margaretta, who already had placed herself on terms of close affection with him. As he finished his tea she whispered into his ear, "Mr. Crosbie, if you could spare half an hour, mamma would so like to see you in her own room." Crosbie declared that he would be delighted to wait upon her, and did in truth feel some gratitude in being welcomed as a son-in-law into the house. And yet he felt also that he was being caught, and that in ascending into the private domains of the countess he would be setting the seal upon his own captivity.

Nevertheless, he went with a smiling face and a light step, Lady Margaretta ushering him the way. "Mamma," said she; "I have brought Mr. Crosbie up to you. I did not know that you were here, Alexandrina, or I should have warned him."

The countess and her youngest daughter had been breakfasting together in the elder lady's sitting-room, and were now seated in a very graceful and well-arranged deshabille. The tea-cups out of which they had been drinking were made of some elegant porcelain, the teapot and cream-jug were of chased silver and as delicate in their way. The remnant of food consisted of morsels of French roll which had not even been allowed to crumble themselves in a disorderly fashion, and of infinitesimal pats of butter. If the morning meal of the two ladies had been as unsubstantial as the appearance of the fragments indicated, it must be presumed that they intended to lunch early. The countess herself was arrayed in an elaborate morning wrapper of figured silk, but the simple Alexandrina wore a plain white muslin peignoir, fastened with pink ribbon. Her hair, which she usually carried in long rolls, now hung loose over her shoulders, and certainly added something to her stock of female charms. The countess got up as Crosbie entered and greeted him

with an open hand; but Alexandrina kept her seat, and merely nodded at him a little welcome. "I must run down again," said Margaretta, "or I shall have left Amelia with all the cares of the house upon her."

"Alexandrina has told me all about it," said the countess, with her sweetest smile; "and I have given her my approval. I really do think you will suit each other very well."

"I am very much obliged to you," said Crosbie. "I'm sure at any rate of this,—that she will suit me very well."

"Yes; I think she will. She is a good sensible girl."

"Phsa, mamma; pray don't go on in that Goody Twoshoes sort of way."

"So you are, my dear. If you were not it would not be well for you to do as you are going to do. If you were giddy and harum-scarum, and devoted to rank and wealth and that sort of thing, it would not be well for you to marry a commoner without fortune. I'm sure Mr. Crosbie will excuse me for saying so much as that."

"Of course I know," said Crosbie, "that I had no right to look so high."

"Well; we'll say nothing more about it," said the countess.

"Pray don't," said Alexandrina. "It sounds so like a sermon."

"Sit down, Mr. Crosbie," said the countess, "and let us have a little conversation. She shall sit by you, if you like it. Nonsense, Alexandrina,—if he asks it!"

"Don't mamma;—I mean to remain where I am."

"Very well, my dear;—then remain where you are. She is a wilful girl, Mr. Crosbie; as you will say when you hear that she has told me all that you told her last night." Upon hearing this, he changed colour a little, but said nothing. "She has told me," continued the countess, "about that young lady at Allington.

Upon my word, I'm afraid you have been very naughty."

"I have been foolish, Lady De Courcy."

"Of course; I did not mean anything worse than that. Yes, you have been foolish;—amusing yourself in a thoughtless way, you know, and, perhaps, a little piqued because a certain lady was not to be won so easily as your Royal Highness wished. Well, now, all that must be settled, you know, as quickly as possible. I don't want to ask any indiscreet questions; but if the young lady has really been left with any idea that you meant anything, don't you think you should undeceive her at once?"

"Of course he will, mamma."

"Of course you will; and it will be a great comfort to Alexandrina to know that the matter is arranged. You hear what Lady Julia is saying almost every hour of her life. Now, of course, Alexandrina does not care what an old maid like Lady Julia may say; but it will be better for all parties that the rumour should be put a stop to. If the earl were to hear it, he might, you know——" And the countess shook her head, thinking that she could thus best indicate what the earl might do, if he were to take it into his head to do anything.

Crosbie could not bring himself to hold any very confidential intercourse with the countess about Lily; but he gave a muttered assurance that he should, as a matter of course, make known the truth to Miss Dale with as little delay as possible. He could not say exactly when he would write, nor whether he would write to her or to her mother; but the thing should be done immediately on his return to town.

"If it will make the matter easier, I will write to Mrs. Dale," said the countess. But to this scheme Mr. Crosbie objected very strongly.

And then a few words were said about the earl. "I will tell him this afternoon," said the countess; "and then you can see him to-morrow morning. I don't suppose he will say very much, you know; and

perhaps he may think,—you won't mind my saying it, I'm sure,—that Alexandrina might have done better. But I don't believe that he'll raise any strong objection. There will be something about settlements, and that sort of thing, of course." Then the countess went away, and Alexandrina was left with her lover for half an hour. When the half-hour was over, he felt that he would have given all that he had in the world to have back the last four and twenty hours of his existence. But he had no hope. To jilt Lily Dale would, no doubt, be within his power, but he knew that he could not jilt Lady Alexandrina De Courcy.

On the next morning at twelve o'clock he had his interview with the father, and a very unpleasant interview it was. He was ushered into the earl's room, and found the great peer standing on the rug, with his back to the fire, and his hands in his breeches pockets.

"So you mean to marry my daughter?" said he. "I'm not very well, as you see; I seldom am."

These last words were spoken in answer to Crosbie's greeting. Crosbie had held out his hand to the earl, and had carried his point so far that the earl had been forced to take one of his own out of his pocket, and give it to his proposed son-in-law.

"If your lordship has no objection. I have, at any rate, her permission to ask for yours."

"I believe you have not any fortune, have you? She's got none; of course you know that?"

"I have a few thousand pounds, and I believe she has as much."

"About as much as will buy bread to keep the two of you from starving. It's nothing to me. You can marry her if you like; only, look here, I'll have no nonsense. I've had an old woman in with me this morning,—one of those that are here in the house,—telling me some story about some other girl that you have made a fool of. It's nothing to me how much of that sort of thing you may have done, so that you do none of it here. But,—if you play any prank of

that kind with me, you'll find that you've made a mistake."

Crosbie hardly made any answer to this, but got himself out of the room as quickly as he could.

"You'd better talk to Gazebee about the trifle of money you've got," said the earl. Then he dismissed the subject from his mind, and no doubt imagined that he had fully done his duty by his daughter.

On the day after this, Crosbie was to go. On the last afternoon, shortly before dinner, he was waylaid by Lady Julia, who had passed the day in preparing traps to catch him.

"Mr. Crosbie," she said, "let me have one word with you. Is this true?"

"Lady Julia," he said, "I really do not know why you should inquire into my private affairs."

"Yes, sir, you do know; you know very well. That poor young lady who has no father and no brother, is my neighbour, and her friends are my friends. She is a friend of my own, and being an old woman, I have a right to speak for her. If this is true, Mr. Crosbie, you are treating her like a villain."

"Lady Julia, I really must decline to discuss the matter with you."

"I'll tell everybody what a villain you are; I will, indeed;—a villain and a poor weak silly fool. She was too good for you; that's what she was." Crosbie, as Lady Julia was addressing to him the last words, hurried upstairs away from her, but her ladyship, standing on a landing-place, spoke up loudly, so that no word should be lost on her retreating enemy.

"We positively must get rid of that woman," the countess, who heard it all, said to Margaretta. "She is disturbing the house and disgracing herself every day."

"She went to papa this morning, mamma."

"She did not get much by that move," said the countess.

On the following morning Crosbie returned to town, but just before he left the castle he received a third

letter from Lily Dale. "I have been rather disappointed at not hearing this morning," said Lily, "for I thought the postman would have brought me a letter. But I know you'll be a better boy when you get back to London, and I won't scold you. Scold you, indeed! No; I'll never scold you, not though I shouldn't hear for a month."

He would have given all that he had in the world, three times told, if he could have blotted out that visit to Courcy Castle from the past facts of his existence.

CHAPTER XXV

ADOLPHUS CROSBIE SPENDS AN EVENING AT HIS CLUB

Crosbie, as he was being driven from the castle to the nearest station, in a dog-cart hired from the hotel, could not keep himself from thinking of that other morning, not yet a fortnight past, on which he had left Allington; and as he thought of it he knew that he was a villain. On this morning Alexandrina had not come out from the house to watch his departure, and catch the last glance of his receding figure. As he had not started very early she had sat with him at the breakfast table; but others also had sat there, and when he got up to go, she did no more than smile softly and give him her hand. It had been already settled that he was to spend his Christmas at Courcy; as it had been also settled that he was to spend it at Allington.

Lady Amelia was, of all the family, the most affectionate to him, and perhaps of them all she was the one whose affection was worth the most. She was not a woman endowed with a very high mind or with very noble feelings. She had begun life trusting to the nobility of her blood for everything, and declaring somewhat loudly among her friends that her father's rank and her mother's birth imposed on her the duty of standing closely by her own order. Nevertheless,

at the age of thirty-three she had married her father's man of business, under circumstances which were not altogether creditable to her. But she had done her duty in her new sphere of life with some constancy and a fixed purpose; and now that her sister was going to marry, as she had done, a man much below herself in social standing, she was prepared to do her duty as a sister and a sister-in-law.

"We shall be up in town in November, and of course you'll come to us at once. Albert Villa, you know, in Hamilton Terrace, St. John's Wood. We dine at seven, and on Sundays at two; and you'll always find a place. Mind you come to us, and make yourself quite at home. I do so hope you and Mortimer will get on well together."

"I'm sure we shall," said Crosbie. But he had had higher hopes in marrying into this noble family than that of becoming intimate with Mortimer Gazebee. What those hopes were he could hardly define to himself now that he had brought himself so near to the fruition of them. Lady De Courcy had certainly promised to write to her first cousin who was Under-Secretary of State for India, with reference to that secretaryship at the General Committee Office; but Crosbie, when he came to weigh in his mind what good might result to him from this, was disposed to think that his chance of obtaining the promotion would be quite as good without the interest of the Under-Secretary of State for India as with it. Now that he belonged, as we may say, to this noble family, he could hardly discern what were the advantages which he had expected from this alliance. He had said to himself that it would be much to have a countess for a mother-in-law; but now, even already, although the possession to which he had looked was not yet garnered, he was beginning to tell himself that the thing was not worth possessing.

As he sat in the train, with a newspaper in his hand, he went on acknowledging to himself that he was a villain. Lady Julia had spoken the truth to him on

the stairs at Courcy, and so he confessed over and over again. But he was chiefly angry with himself for this,—that he had been a villain without gaining anything by his villany, that he had been a villain, and was to lose so much by his villany. He made comparison between Lily and Alexandrina, and owned to himself, over and over again, that Lily would make the best wife that a man could take to his bosom. As to Alexandrina, he knew the thinness of her character. She would stick by him, no doubt; and in a circuitous, discontented, unhappy way, would probably be true to her duties as a wife and mother. She would be nearly such another as Lady Amelia Gazebee. But was that a prize sufficiently rich to make him contented with his own prowess and skill in winning it? And was that a prize sufficiently rich to justify him to himself for his terrible villany? Lily Dale he had loved; and he now declared to himself that he could have continued to love her through his whole life. But what was there for any man to love in Alexandrina De Courcy?

While resolving, during his first four or five days at the castle, that he would throw Lily Dale overboard, he had contrived to quiet his conscience by inward allusions to sundry heroes of romance. He had thought of Lothario, Don Juan, and of Lovelace; and had told himself that the world had ever been full of such heroes. And the world, too, had treated such heroes well; not punishing them at all as villains, but caressing them rather, and calling them curled darlings. Why should not he be a curled darling as well as another? Ladies had ever been fond of the Don Juan character, and Don Juan had generally been popular with men also. And then he named to himself a dozen modern Lotharios,—men who were holding their heads well above water, although it was known that they had played this lady false, and brought that other one to death's door, or perhaps even to death itself. War and love were alike, and the world was prepared to forgive any guile to militants in either camp.

But now that he had done the deed he found himself

forced to look at it from quite another point of view. Suddenly that character of Lothario showed itself to him in a different light, and one in which it did not please him to look at it as belonging to himself. He began to feel that it would be almost impossible for him to write that letter to Lily, which it was absolutely necessary that he should write. He was in a position in which his mind would almost turn itself to thoughts of self-destruction as the only means of escape. A fortnight ago he was a happy man, having everything before him that a man ought to want; and now—now that he was the accepted son-in-law of an earl, and the confident expectant of high promotion—he was the most miserable, degraded wretch in the world!

He changed his clothes at his lodgings in Mount Street and went down to his club to dinner. He could, at any rate, do nothing that night. His letter to Allington must, no doubt, be written at once; but, as he could not send it before the next night's post, he was not forced to set to work upon it that evening. As he walked along Piccadilly on his way to St. James's Square, it occurred to him that it might be well to write a short line to Lily, telling her nothing of the truth,—a note written as though his engagement with her was still unbroken, but yet written with care, saying nothing about that engagement, so as to give him a little time. Then he thought that he would telegraph to Bernard and tell everything to him. Bernard would, of course, be prepared to avenge his cousin in some way, but for such vengeance Crosbie felt that he should care little. Lady Julia had told him that Lily was without father or brother, thereby accusing him of the basest cowardice. "I wish she had a dozen brothers," he said to himself. But he hardly knew why he expressed such a wish.

He returned to London on the last day of October, and he found the streets at the West End nearly deserted. He thought, therefore, that he should be quite alone at his club, but as he entered the dinner room he saw one of his oldest and most intimate friends

standing before the fire. Fowler Pratt was the man who had first brought him into Sebright's, and had given him almost his earliest start on his successful career in life. Since that time he and his friend Fowler Pratt had lived in close communion, though Pratt had always held a certain ascendancy in their friendship. He was in age a few years senior to Crosbie, and was in truth a man of better parts. But he was less ambitious, less desirous of shining in the world, and much less popular with men in general. He was possessed of a moderate private fortune on which he lived in a quiet, modest manner, and was unmarried, not likely to marry, inoffensive, useless, and prudent. For the first few years of Crosbie's life in London he had lived very much with his friend Pratt, and had been accustomed to depend much on his friend's counsel; but latterly, since he had himself become somewhat noticeable, he had found more pleasure in the society of such men as Dale, who were not his superiors either in age or wisdom. But there had been no coolness between him and Pratt, and now they met with perfect cordiality.

"I thought you were down in Barsetshire," said Pratt.

"And I thought you were in Switzerland."

"I have been in Switzerland," said Pratt.

"And I have been in Barsetshire," said Crosbie. Then they ordered their dinner together.

"And so you're going to be married?" said Pratt, when the waiter had carried away the cheese.

"Who told you that?"

"Well, but you are? Never mind who told me, if I was told the truth."

"But if it be not true?"

"I have heard it for the last month," said Pratt, "and it has been spoken of as a thing certain; and it is true; is it not?"

"I believe it is," said Crosbie, slowly.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you, that you speak of it in that way? Am I to congratulate

you, or am I not? The lady, I'm told, is a cousin of Dale's."

Crosbie had turned his chair from the table round to the fire, and said nothing in answer to this. He sat with his glass of sherry in his hand, looking at the coals, and thinking whether it would not be well that he should tell the whole story to Pratt. No one could give him better advice; and no one, as far as he knew his friend, would be less shocked at the telling of such a story. Pratt had no romance about women, and had never pretended to very high sentiments.

"Come up into the smoking-room and I'll tell you all about it," said Crosbie. So they went off together, and, as the smoking-room was untenanted, Crosbie was able to tell his story.

He found it very hard to tell;—much harder than he had beforehand fancied. "I have got into terrible trouble," he began by saying. Then he told how he had fallen suddenly in love with Lily, how he had been rash and imprudent, how nice she was—"infinitely too good for such a man as I am," he said;—how she had accepted him, and then how he had repented. "I should have told you beforehand," he then said, "that I was already half engaged to Lady Alexandrina De Courcy." The reader, however, will understand that this half-engagement was a fiction.

"And now you mean that you are altogether engaged to her?"

"Exactly so."

"And that Miss Dale must be told that, on second thoughts, you have changed your mind?"

"I know that I have behaved very badly," said Crosbie.

"Indeed you have," said his friend.

"It is one of those troubles in which a man finds himself involved almost before he knows where he is."

"Well; I can't look at it exactly in that light. A man may amuse himself with a girl, and I can understand his disappointing her and not offering to marry her,—though even that sort of thing isn't much to my

taste. But, by George, to make an offer of marriage to such a girl as that in September, to live for a month in her family as her affianced husband, and then coolly go away to another house in October, and make an offer to another girl of higher rank——"

"You know very well that that has had nothing to do with it."

"It looks very like it. And how are you going to communicate these tidings to Miss Dale?"

"I don't know," said Crosbie, who was beginning to be very sore.

"And you have quite made up your mind that you'll stick to the earl's daughter?"

The idea of jilting Alexandrina instead of Lily had never as yet presented itself to Crosbie, and now, as he thought of it, he could not perceive that it was feasible.

"Yes," he said, "I shall marry Lady Alexandrina;—that is, if I do not cut the whole concern, and my own throat into the bargain."

"If I were in your shoes I think I should cut the whole concern. I could not stand it. What do you mean to say to Miss Dale's uncle?"

"I don't care a —— for Miss Dale's uncle," said Crosbie. "If he were to walk in at that door this moment, I would tell him the whole story, without——"

As he was yet speaking, one of the club servants opened the door of the smoking-room, and seeing Crosbie seated in a lounging-chair near the fire, went up to him with a gentleman's card. Crosbie took the card and read the name. "Mr. Dale, Allington."

"The gentleman is in the waiting-room," said the servant.

Crosbie for the moment was struck dumb. He had declared that very moment that he should feel no personal disinclination to meet Mr. Dale, and now that gentleman was within the walls of the club, waiting to see him!

"Who's that?" asked Pratt. And then Crosbie handed him the card. "Whew-w-w-hew," whistled Pratt.

"Did you tell the gentleman I was here?" asked Crosbie.

"I said I thought you were upstairs, sir."

"That will do," said Pratt. "The gentleman will no doubt wait for a minute." And then the servant went out of the room. "Now, Crosbie, you must make up your mind. By one of those women and all her friends you will ever be regarded as a rascal, and they of course will look out to punish you with such punishment as may come to their hands. You must now choose which shall be the sufferer."

The man was a coward at heart. The reflection that he might, even now, at this moment, meet the old squire on pleasant terms,—or at any rate not on terms of defiance, pleaded more strongly in Lily's favour than had any other argument since Crosbie had first made up his mind to abandon her. He did not fear personal ill-usage;—he was not afraid lest he should be kicked or beaten; but he did not dare to face the just anger of the angry man.

"If I were you," said Pratt, "I would not go down to that man at the present moment for a trifle."

"But what can I do?"

"Shirk away out of the club. Only if you do that it seems to me that you'll have to go on shirking for the rest of your life."

"Pratt, I must say that I expected something more like friendship from you."

"What can I do for you? There are positions in which it is impossible to help a man. I tell you plainly that you have behaved very badly. I do not see that I can help you."

"Would you see him?"

"Certainly not, if I am to be expected to take your part."

"Take any part you like,—only tell him the truth."

"And what is the truth?"

"I was part engaged to that other girl before; and then, when I came to think of it, I knew that I was not fit to marry Miss Dale. I know I have behaved

badly; but, Pratt, thousands have done the same thing before."

"I can only say that I have not been so unfortunate as to reckon any of those thousands among my friends."

"You mean to tell me, then, that you are going to turn your back on me?" said Crosbie.

"I haven't said anything of the kind. I certainly won't undertake to defend you, for I don't see that your conduct admits of defence. I will see this gentleman if you wish it, and tell him anything that you may desire me to tell him."

At this moment the servant returned with a note for Crosbie. Mr. Dale had called for paper and envelope, and sent up to him the following missive:—"Do you intend to come down to me? I know that you are in the house." "For heaven's sake go to him," said Crosbie. "He is well aware that I was deceived about his niece,—that I thought he was to give her some fortune. He knows all about that, and that when I learned from him that she was to have nothing——"

"Upon my word, Crosbie, I wish you could find another messenger."

"Ah! you do not understand," said Crosbie in his agony. "You think that I am inventing this plea about her fortune now. It isn't so. He will understand. We have talked all this over before, and he knew how terribly I was disappointed. Shall I wait for you here, or will you come to my lodgings? Or I will go down to the Beaufort, and will wait for you there." And it was finally arranged that he should get himself out of this club and wait at the other for Pratt's report of the interview.

"Do you go down first," said Crosbie.

"Yes: I had better," said Pratt. "Otherwise you may be seen. Mr. Dale would have his eye upon you, and there would be a row in the house." There was a smile of sarcasm on Pratt's face as he spoke which angered Crosbie even in his misery, and made him long to tell his friend that he would not trouble him with this mission,—that he would manage his own

affairs himself; but he was weakened and mentally humiliated by the sense of his own rascality, and had already lost the power of asserting himself, and of maintaining his ascendancy. He was beginning to recognize the fact that he had done that for which he must endure to be kicked, to be kicked morally if not materially; and that it was no longer possible for him to hold his head up without shame.

Pratt took Mr. Dale's note in his hand and went down into the strangers' room. There he found the squire standing, so that he could see through the open door of the room to the foot of the stairs down which Crosbie must descend before he could leave the club. As a measure of first precaution the ambassador closed the door; then he bowed to Mr. Dale, and asked him if he would take a chair.

"I wanted to see Mr. Crosbie," said the squire.

"I have your note to that gentleman in my hand," said he. "He has thought it better that you should have this interview with me;—and under all the circumstances perhaps it is better."

"Is he such a coward that he dare not see me?"

"There are some actions, Mr. Dale, that will make a coward of any man. My friend Crosbie is, I take it, brave enough in the ordinary sense of the word, but he has injured you."

"It is all true, then?"

"Yes, Mr. Dale; I fear it is all true."

"And you call that man your friend! Mr.——; I don't know what your name is."

"Pratt;—Fowler Pratt. I have known Crosbie for fourteen years,—ever since he was a boy; and it is not my way, Mr. Dale, to throw over an old friend under any circumstances."

"Not if he committed a murder?"

"No; not though he committed a murder."

"If what I hear is true, this man is worse than a murderer."

"Of course, Mr. Dale, I cannot know what you have heard. I believe that Mr. Crosbie has behaved very

badly to your niece, Miss Dale; I believe that he was engaged to marry her, or, at any rate, that some such proposition had been made."

"Proposition! Why, sir, it was a thing so completely understood that everybody knew it in the county. It was so positively fixed that there was no secret about it. Upon my honour, Mr. Pratt, I can't as yet understand it. If I remember right, it's not a fortnight since he left my house at Allington,—not a fortnight. And that poor girl was with him on the morning of his going as his betrothed bride. Not a fortnight since! And now I've had a letter from an old family friend telling me that he is going to marry one of Lord De Courcy's daughters! I went instantly off to Courcy, and found that he had started for London. Now, I have followed him here; and you tell me it's all true."

"I am afraid it is, Mr. Dale; too true."

"I don't understand it; I don't, indeed. I cannot bring myself to believe that the man who was sitting the other day at my table should be so great a scoundrel. Did he mean it all the time that he was there?"

"No; certainly not. Lady Alexandrina De Courcy was, I believe, an old friend of his;—with whom, perhaps, he had had some lovers' quarrel. On his going to Courcy they made it up; and this is the result."

"And that is to be sufficient for my poor girl?"

"You will, of course, understand that I am not defending Mr. Crosbie. The whole affair is very sad,—very sad, indeed. I can only say, in his excuse, that he is not the first man who has behaved badly to a lady."

"And that is his message to me, is it? And that is what I am to tell my niece? You have been deceived by a scoundrel. But what then? You are not the first! Mr. Pratt, I give you my word as a gentleman, I do not understand it. I have lived a good deal out of the world, and am, therefore, perhaps, more astonished than I ought to be."

"Mr. Dale, I feel for you——"

"Feel for me! What is to become of my girl? And do you suppose that I will let this other marriage go on; that I will not tell the De Courcys, and all the world at large, what sort of a man this is;—that I will not get at him to punish him? Does he think that I will put up with this?"

"I do not know what he thinks; I must only beg that you will not mix me up in the matter—as though I were a participator in his offence."

"Will you tell him from me that I desire to see him?"

"I do not think that that would do any good."

"Never mind, sir; you have brought me his message; will you have the goodness now to take back mine to him?"

"Do you mean at once—this evening,—now?"

"Yes, at once—this evening,—now;—this minute."

"Ah; he has left the club; he is not here now; he went when I came to you."

"Then he is a coward as well as a scoundrel." In answer to which assertion, Mr. Fowler Pratt merely shrugged his shoulders.

"He is a coward as well as a scoundrel. Will you have the kindness to tell your friend from me that he is a coward and a scoundrel,—and a liar, sir."

"If it be so, Miss Dale is well quit of her engagement."

"That is your consolation, is it? That may be all very well now-a-days; but when I was a young man, I would sooner have burnt out my tongue than have spoken in such a way on such a subject. I would, indeed. Good-night, Mr. Pratt. Pray make your friend understand that he has not yet seen the last of the Dales; although, as you hint, the ladies of that family will no doubt have learned that he is not fit to associate with them." Then, taking up his hat, the squire made his way out of the club.

"I would not have done it," said Pratt to himself, "for all the beauty, and all the wealth, and all the rank that ever were owned by a woman."

CHAPTER XXVI

LORD DE COURCY IN THE BOSOM OF HIS FAMILY

Lady Julia de Guest had not during her life written many letters to Mr. Dale of Allington, nor had she ever been very fond of him. But when she felt certain how things were going at Courcy, or rather, as we may say, how they had already gone, she took pen in hand, and sat herself to work, doing, as she conceived, her duty by her neighbour.

My dear Mr. Dale (she said),

I believe I need make no secret of having known that your niece Lilian is engaged to Mr. Crosbie, of London. I think it proper to warn you that if this be true Mr. Crosbie is behaving himself in a very improper manner here. I am not a person who concern myself much in the affairs of other people; and under ordinary circumstances, the conduct of Mr. Crosbie would be nothing to me,—or, indeed, less than nothing; but I do to you as I would wish that others should do unto me. I believe it is only too true that Mr. Crosbie has proposed to Lady Alexandrina De Courcy, and been accepted by her. I think you will believe that I would not say this without warrant, and if there be anything in it, it may be well, for the poor young lady's sake, that you should put yourself in the way of learning the truth.

Believe me to be yours sincerely,

Julia de Guest.

Courcy Castle, Thursday.

The squire had never been very fond of any of the De Guest family, and had, perhaps, liked Lady Julia the least of them all. He was wont to call her a meddling old woman,—remembering her bitterness and pride in those now long bygone days in which the gallant major had run off with Lady Fanny. When he first received this letter, he did not, on the first

reading of it, believe a word of its contents. "Cross-grained old harridan," he said out loud to his nephew. "Look what that aunt of yours has written to me." Bernard read the letter twice, and as he did so his face became hard and angry.

"You don't mean to say you believe it?" said the squire.

"I don't think it will be safe to disregard it."

"What! you think it possible that your friend is doing as she says?"

"It is certainly possible. He was angry when he found that Lily had no fortune."

"Heavens, Bernard! And you can speak of it in that way?"

"I don't say that it is true; but I think we should look to it. I will go to Courcy Castle and learn the truth."

The squire at last decided that he would go. He went to Courcy Castle, and found that Crosbie had started two hours before his arrival. He asked for Lady Julia, and learned from her that Crosbie had actually left the house as the betrothed husband of Lady Alexandrina.

"The countess, I am sure, will not contradict it, if you will see her," said Lady Julia. But this the squire was unwilling to do. He would not proclaim the wretched condition of his niece more loudly than was necessary, and therefore he started on his pursuit of Crosbie. What was his success on that evening we have already learned.

Both Lady Alexandrina and her mother heard of Mr. Dale's arrival at the castle, but nothing was said between them on the subject. Lady Amelia Gazebee heard of it also and she ventured to discuss the matter with her sister.

"You don't know exactly how far it went, do you?"

"No; yes;—not exactly, that is," said Alexandrina.

"I suppose he did say something about marriage to the girl?"

"Yes, I'm afraid he did."

"Dear, dear! It's very unfortunate. What sort of people are those Dales? I suppose he talked to you about them."

"No, he didn't; not very much. I dare say she is an artful, sly thing! It's a great pity men should go on in such a way."

"Yes, it is," said Lady Amelia. "And I do suppose that in this case the blame has been more with him than with her. It's only right I should tell you that."

"But what can I do?"

"I don't say you can do anything; but it's as well you should know."

"But I don't know, and you don't know; and I can't see that there is any use talking about it now. I knew him a long while before she did, and if she has allowed him to make a fool of her, it isn't my fault."

"Nobody says it is, my dear."

"But you seem to preach to me about it. What can I do for the girl? The fact is, he don't care for her a bit, and never did."

"Then he shouldn't have told her that he did."

"That's all very well, Amelia; but people don't always do exactly all that they ought to do. I suppose Mr. Crosbie isn't the first man that has proposed to two ladies. I dare say it was wrong, but I can't help it. As to Mr. Dale coming here with a tale of his niece's wrongs, I think it very absurd,—very absurd indeed. It makes it look as though there had been a scheme to catch Mr. Crosbie, and it's my belief that there was such a scheme."

"I only hope that there'll be no quarrel."

"Men don't fight duels now-a-days, Amelia."

"But do you remember what Frank Gresham did to Mr. Moffat when he behaved so badly to poor Augusta?"

"Mr. Crosbie isn't afraid of that kind of thing. And I always thought that Frank was very wrong,—very wrong indeed. What's the good of two men beating each other in the street?"

"Well; I'm sure I hope there'll be no quarrel. But I own I don't like the look of it. You see the uncle must have known all about it, and have consented to the marriage, or he would not have come here."

"I don't see that it can make any difference to me, Amelia."

"No, my dear, I don't see that it can. We shall be up in town soon, and I will see as much as possible of Mr. Crosbie. The marriage, I hope, will take place soon."

"He talks of February."

"Don't put it off, Alley, whatever you do. There are so many slips, you know, in these things."

"I'm not a bit afraid of that," said Alexandrina, sticking up her head.

"I dare say not; and you may be sure that we will keep an eye on him. Mortimer will get him up to dine with us as often as possible, and as his leave of absence is all over, he can't get out of town. He's to be here at Christmas, isn't he?"

"Of course he is."

"Mind you keep him to that. And as to these Dales, I would be very careful, if I were you, not to say anything unkind of them to any one. It sounds badly in your position." And with this last piece of advice Lady Amelia Gazebee allowed the subject to drop.

On that day Lady Julia returned to her own home. Her adieux to the whole family at Courcy Castle was very cold, but about Mr. Crosbie and his lady-love at Allington she said no further word to any of them. Alexandrina did not show herself at all on the occasion, and indeed had not spoken to her enemy since that evening on which she had felt herself constrained to retreat from the drawing-room.

"Good-by," said the countess. "You have been so good to come, and we have enjoyed it so much."

"I thank you very much. Good morning," said Lady Julia, with a stately courtesy.

"Pray remember me to your brother. I wish we

could have seen him; I hope he has not been hurt by the—the bull." And then Lady Julia went her way.

"What a fool I have been to have that woman in the house," said the countess, before the door was closed behind her guest's back.

"Indeed you have," said Lady Julia, screaming back through the passage. Then there was a long silence, then a suppressed titter, and after that a loud laugh.

"Oh, mamma, what shall we do?" said Lady Amelia.

"Do!" said Margaretta; "why should we do anything? She has heard the truth for once in her life."

"Dear Lady Dumbello, what will you think of us?" said the countess, turning round to another guest, who was also just about to depart. "Did any one ever know such a woman before?"

"I think she's very nice," said Lady Dumbello, smiling.

"I can't quite agree with you there," said Lady Clandidlem. "But I do believe she means to do her best. She is very charitable, and all that sort of thing."

"I'm sure I don't know," said Rosina. "I asked her for a subscription to the mission for putting down the Papists in the west of Ireland, and she refused me point-blank."

"Now, my dear, if you're quite ready," said Lord Dumbello, coming into the room. Then there was another departure; but on this occasion the countess waited till the doors were shut, and the retreating footsteps were no longer heard. "Have you observed," said she to Lady Clandidlem, "that she has not held her head up since Mr. Palliser went away?"

"Indeed I have," said Lady Clandidlem. "As for poor Dumbello, he's the blindest creature I ever saw in my life."

"We shall hear of something before next May," said Lady De Courcy, shaking her head; "but for all that she'll never be Duchess of Omnium."

"I wonder what your mamma will say of me when

I go away to-morrow," said Lady Clandidlem to Margaretta, as they walked across the hall together.

"She won't say that you are going to run away with any gentleman," said Margaretta.

"At any rate not with the earl," said Lady Clandidlem. "Ha, ha, ha! Well, we are all very good-natured, are we not? The best is that it means nothing."

Thus by degrees all the guests went, and the family of the De Courcys was left to the bliss of their own domestic circle. This, we may presume, was not without its charms, seeing that there were so many feelings in common between the mother and her children. There were drawbacks to it, no doubt, arising perhaps chiefly from the earl's bodily infirmities. "When your father speaks to me," said Mrs. George to her husband, "he puts me in such a shiver that I cannot open my mouth to answer him."

"You should stand up to him," said George. "He can't hurt you, you know. Your money's your own; and if I'm ever to be the heir, it won't be by his doing."

"But he gnashes his teeth at me."

"You shouldn't care for that, if he don't bite. He used to gnash them at me; and when I had to ask him for money I didn't like it; but now I don't mind him a bit. He threw the peerage at me one day, but it didn't go within a yard of my head."

"If he throws anything at me, George, I shall drop upon the spot."

But the countess had a worse time with the earl than any of her children. It was necessary that she should see him daily, and necessary also that she should say much that he did not like to hear, and make many petitions that caused him to gnash his teeth. The earl was one of those men who could not endure to live otherwise than expensively, and yet was made miserable by every recurring expense. He ought to have known by this time that butchers, and bakers, and corn-chandlers, and coal-merchants will not supply

their goods for nothing; and yet it always seemed as though he had expected that at this special period they would do so. He was an embarrassed man, no doubt, and had not been fortunate in his speculations at Newmarket or Homburg; but, nevertheless, he had still the means of living without daily torment; and it must be supposed that his self-imposed sufferings, with regard to money, rose rather from his disposition than his necessities. His wife never knew whether he was really ruined, or simply pretending it. She had now become so used to her position in this respect, that she did not allow fiscal considerations to mar her happiness. Food and clothing had always come to her,—including velvet gowns, new trinkets, and a man-cook,—and she presumed that they would continue to come. But that daily conference with her husband was almost too much for her. She struggled to avoid it; and, as far as the ways and means were concerned, would have allowed them to arrange themselves, if he would only have permitted it. But he insisted on seeing her daily in his own sitting-room; and she had acknowledged to her favourite daughter, Margaretta, that those half-hours would soon be the death of her. "I sometimes feel," she said, "that I am going mad before I can get out." And she reproached herself, probably without reason, in that she had brought much of this upon herself. In former days the earl had been constantly away from home, and the countess had complained. Like many other women she had not known when she was well off. She had complained, urging upon her lord that he should devote more of his time to his own hearth. It is probable that her ladyship's remonstrances had been less efficacious than the state of his own health in producing that domestic constancy which he now practised; but it is certain that she looked back with bitter regret to the happy days when she was deserted, jealous, and querulous. "Don't you wish we could get Sir Omicron to order him to the German Spas?" she had said to Margaretta. Now Sir Omicron was

the great London physician, and might, no doubt, do much in that way.

But no such happy order had as yet been given; and, as far as the family could foresee, paterfamilias intended to pass the winter with them at Courcy. The guests, as I have said, were all gone, and none but the family were in the house when her ladyship waited upon her lord one morning at twelve o'clock, a few days after Mr. Dale's visit to the castle. He always breakfasted alone, and after breakfast found in a French novel and a cigar what solace those innocent recreations were still able to afford him. When the novel no longer excited him and when he was saturated with smoke, he would send for his wife. After that, his valet would dress him. "She gets it worse than I do," the man declared in the servants' hall; "and minds it a deal more. I can give warning, and she can't."

"Better? No, I ain't better," the husband said, in answer to his wife's inquiries. "I never shall be better while you keep that cook in the kitchen."

"But where are we to get another if we send him away?"

"It's not my business to find cooks. I don't know where you're to get one. It's my belief you won't have a cook at all before long. It seems you have got two extra men into the house without telling me."

"We must have servants, you know, when there is company. It wouldn't do to have Lady Dumbello here, and no one to wait on her."

"Who asked Lady Dumbello? I didn't."

"I'm sure, my dear, you liked having her here."

"D—— Lady Dumbello!" and then there was a pause. The countess had no objection whatsoever to the above proposition, and was rejoiced that that question of the servants was allowed to slip aside, through the aid of her ladyship.

"Look at that letter from Porlock," said the earl; and he pushed over to the unhappy mother a letter from her eldest son. Of all her children he was the

one she loved the best; but him she was never allowed to see under her own roof. "I sometimes think that he is the greatest rascal with whom I ever had occasion to concern myself," said the earl.

She took the letter and read it. The epistle was certainly not one which a father could receive with pleasure from his son; but the disagreeable nature of its contents was the fault rather of the parent than of the child. The writer intimated that certain money due to him had not been paid with necessary punctuality, and that unless he received it, he should instruct his lawyer to take some authorized legal proceedings. Lord De Courcy had raised certain moneys on the family property, which he could not have raised without the co-operation of his heir, and had bound himself, in return for that co-operation, to pay a certain fixed income to his eldest son. This he regarded as an allowance from himself; but Lord Porlock regarded it as his own, by lawful claim. The son had not worded his letter with any affectionate phraseology. "Lord Porlock begs to inform Lord De Courcy——" Such had been the commencement.

"I suppose he must have his money; else how can he live?" said the countess, trembling.

"Live!" shouted the earl. "And so you think it proper that he should write such a letter as that to his father!"

"It is all very unfortunate," she replied.

"I don't know where the money's to come from. As for him, if he were starving, it would serve him right. He's a disgrace to the name and the family. From all I hear, he won't live long."

"Oh, De Courcy, don't talk of it in that way!"

"What way am I to talk of it? If I say that he's my greatest comfort, and living as becomes a nobleman, and is a fine healthy man of his age, with a good wife and a lot of legitimate children, will that make you believe it? Women are such fools. Nothing that I say will make him worse than he is."

"But he may reform."

"Reform! He's over forty, and when I last saw him he looked nearly sixty. There;—you may answer his letter; I won't."

"And about the money?"

"Why doesn't he write to Gazebee about his dirty money? Why does he trouble me? I haven't got his money. Ask Gazebee about his money. I won't trouble myself about it." Then there was another pause, during which the countess folded the letter, and put it in her pocket.

"How long is George going to remain here with that woman?" he asked.

"I'm sure she is very harmless," pleaded the countess.

"I always think when I see her that I'm sitting down to dinner with my own housemaid. I never saw such a woman. How he can put up with it! But I don't suppose he cares for anything."

"It has made him very steady."

"Steady!"

"And as she will be confined before long it may be as well that she should remain here. If Porlock doesn't marry, you know——"

"And so he means to live here altogether, does he? I'll tell you what it is,—I won't have it. He's better able to keep a house over his own head and his wife's than I am to do it for them, and so you may tell them. I won't have it. D'ye hear?" Then there was another short pause. "D'ye hear?" he shouted at her.

"Yes; of course I hear. I was only thinking you wouldn't wish me to turn them out, just as her confinement is coming on."

"I know what that means. Then they'd never go. I won't have it; and if you don't tell them I will." In answer to this Lady De Courcy promised that she would tell them, thinking perhaps that the earl's mode of telling might not be beneficial in that particular epoch which was now coming in the life of Mrs. George.

"Did you know," said he, breaking out on a new subject, "that a man had been here named Dale, calling on somebody in this house?" In answer to which the countess acknowledged that she had known it.

"Then why did you keep it from me?" And that gnashing of the teeth took place which was so specially objectionable to Mrs. George.

"It was a matter of no moment. He came to see Lady Julia De Guest."

"Yes; but he came about that man Crosbie."

"I suppose he did."

"Why have you let that girl be such a fool? You'll find he'll play her some knave's trick."

"Oh dear, no."

"And why should she want to marry such a man as that?"

"He's quite a gentleman, you know, and very much thought of in the world. It won't be at all bad for her, poor thing. It is so very hard for a girl to get married now-a-days without money."

"And so they're to take up with anybody. As far as I can see, this is a worse affair than that of Amelia."

"Amelia has done very well, my dear."

"Oh, if you call it doing well for your girls, I don't. I call it doing uncommon badly; about as bad as they well can do. But it's your affair. I have never meddled with them, and don't intend to do it now."

"I really think she'll be happy, and she is devotedly attached to the young man."

"Devotedly attached to the young man!" The tone and manner in which the earl repeated these words were such as to warrant an opinion that his lordship might have done very well on the stage had his attention been called to that profession. "It makes me sick to hear people talk in that way. She wants to get married, and she's a fool for her pains;—I can't help that; only remember that I'll have no nonsense here about that other girl. If he gives me

trouble of that sort, by —— I'll be the death of him. When is the marriage to be?"

"They talk of February."

"I won't have any tomfoolery and expense. If she chooses to marry a clerk in an office, she shall marry him as clerks are married."

"He'll be the secretary before that, De Courcy."

"What difference does that make? Secretary, indeed! What sort of men do you suppose secretaries are? A beggar that came from nobody knows where! I won't have any tomfoolery;—d'ye hear?" Whereupon the countess said that she did hear, and soon afterwards managed to escape. The valet then took his turn; and repeated, after his hour of service, that "Old Nick" in his tantrums had been more like the Prince of Darkness than ever.

CHAPTER XXVII

"ON MY HONOUR, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND IT"

In the meantime Lady Alexandrina endeavoured to realize to herself all the advantages and disadvantages of her own position. She was not possessed of strong affections, nor of depth of character, nor of high purpose; but she was no fool, nor was she devoid of principle. She had asked herself many times whether her present life was so happy as to make her think that a permanent continuance in it would suffice for her desires, and she had always replied to herself that she would fain change to some other life if it were possible. She had also questioned herself as to her rank, of which she was quite sufficiently proud, and had told herself that she could not degrade herself in the world without a heavy pang. But she had at last taught herself to believe that she had more to gain by becoming the wife of such a man as Crosbie than by remaining as an unmarried daughter of her father's house. There was much in her sister Amelia's

position which she did not envy, but there was less to envy in that of her sister Rosina. The Gazebee house in St. John's Wood Road was not so magnificent as Courcy Castle; but then it was less dull, less embittered by torment, and was moreover her sister's own.

"Very many do marry commoners," she had said to Margaretta.

"Oh, yes, of course. It makes a difference, you know, when a man has a fortune."

Of course it did make a difference. Crosbie had no fortune, was not even so rich as Mr. Gazebee, could keep no carriage, and would have no country house. But then he was a man of fashion, was more thought of in the world than Mr. Gazebee, might probably rise in his own profession,—and was at any rate thoroughly presentable. She would have preferred a gentleman with £5,000 a year; but then as no gentleman with £5,000 a year came that way, would she not be happier with Mr. Crosbie than she would be with no husband at all? She was not very much in love with Mr. Crosbie, but she thought that she could live with him comfortably, and that on the whole it would be a good thing to be married.

And she made certain resolves as to the manner in which she would do her duty by her husband. Her sister Amelia was paramount in her own house, ruling indeed with a moderate, endurable dominion, and ruling much to her husband's advantage. Alexandrina feared that she would not be allowed to rule, but she could at any rate try. She would do all in her power to make him comfortable, and would be specially careful not to irritate him by any insistence on her own higher rank. She would be very meek in this respect; and if children should come she would be as painstaking about them as though her own father had been merely a clergyman or a lawyer. She thought also much about poor Lilian Dale, asking herself sundry questions, with an idea of being high-principled as to her duty in that respect. Was she

wrong in taking Mr. Crosbie away from Lilian Dale? In answer to these questions she was able to assure herself comfortably that she was not wrong. Mr. Crosbie would not, under any circumstances, marry Lilian Dale. He had told her so more than once, and that in a solemn way. She could therefore be doing no harm to Lilian Dale. If she entertained any inner feeling that Crosbie's fault in jilting Lilian Dale was less than it would have been had she herself not been an earl's daughter,—that her own rank did in some degree extenuate her lover's falseness,—she did not express it in words even to herself.

She did not get very much sympathy from her own family. "I'm afraid he does not think much of his religious duties. I'm told that young men of that sort seldom do," said Rosina. "I don't say you're wrong," said Margaretta. "By no means. Indeed I think less of it now than I did when Amelia did the same thing. I shouldn't do it myself, that's all." Her father told her that he supposed she knew her own mind. Her mother, who endeavoured to comfort and in some sort to congratulate her, nevertheless harped constantly on the fact that she was marrying a man without rank and without a fortune. Her congratulations were apologetic, and her comfortings took the guise of consolation. "Of course you won't be rich, my dear; but I really think you'll do very well. Mr. Crosbie may be received anywhere, and you never need be ashamed of him." By which the countess implied that her elder married daughter was occasionally called on to be ashamed of her husband. "I wish he could keep a carriage for you, but perhaps that will come some day." Upon the whole Alexandrina did not repent, and stoutly told her father that she did know her own mind.

During all this time Lily Dale was as yet perfect in her happiness. That delay of a day or two in the receipt of the expected letter from her lover had not disquieted her. She had promised him that she would not distrust him, and she was firmly minded to keep

her promises. Indeed no idea of breaking it came to her at this time. She was disappointed when the postman would come and bring no letter for her, disappointed, as is the husbandman when the longed-for rain does not come to refresh the parched earth; but she was in no degree angry. "He will explain it," she said to herself. And she assured Bell that men never recognized the hunger and thirst after letters which women feel when away from those whom they love.

Then they heard at the Small House that the squire had gone away from Allington. During the last few days Bernard had not been much with them, and now they heard the news, not through their cousin, but from Hopkins. "I really can't undertake to say, Miss Bell, where the master's gone to. It's not likely the master 'd tell me where he was going to; not unless it was about seeds, or the likes of that."

"He has gone very suddenly," said Bell.

"Well, miss, I've nothing to say to that. And why shouldn't he go sudden if he likes? I only know he had his gig, and went to the station. If you was to bury me alive I couldn't tell you more."

"I should like to try," said Lily as they walked away. "He's such a cross old thing. I wonder whether Bernard has gone with my uncle." And then they thought no more about it.

On the day after that Bernard came down to the Small House, but he said nothing by way of accounting for the squire's absence. "He's in London, I know," said Bernard.

"I hope he'll call on Mr. Crosbie," said Lily. But on this subject Bernard said not a word. He did ask Lily whether she had heard from Adolphus, in answer to which she replied, with as indifferent a voice as she could assume, that she had not had a letter that morning.

"I shall be angry with him if he's not a good correspondent," said Mrs. Dale, when she and Lily were alone together.

"No, mamma, you mustn't be angry with him. I won't let you be angry with him. Please to remember he's my lover and not yours."

"But I can see you when you watch for the postman."

"I won't watch for the postman any more if it makes you have bad thoughts about him. Yes, they are bad thoughts. I won't have you think that he doesn't do everything that is right."

On the next morning the postman brought a letter, or rather a note, and Lily at once saw that it was from Crosbie. She had contrived to intercept it near the back door, at which the postman called, so that her mother should not watch her watchings, nor see her disappointment if none should come. "Thank you, Jane," she said, very calmly, when the eager, kindly girl ran to her with the little missive; and she walked off to some solitude, trying to hide her impatience. The note had seemed so small that it amazed her; but when she opened it the contents amazed her more. There was neither beginning nor end. There was no appellation of love, and no signature. It contained but two lines. "I will write to you at length to-morrow. This is my first day in London, and I have been so driven about that I cannot write." That was all, and it was scrawled on half a sheet of note-paper. Why, at any rate, had he not called her his dearest Lily? Why had he not assured her that he was ever her own? Such expressions, meaning so much, may be conveyed in a glance of the pen. "Ah," she said, "if he knew how I hunger and thirst after his love!"

She had but a moment left to her before she must rejoin her mother and sister, and she used that moment in remembering her promise. "I know it is all right," she said to herself. "He does not think of these things as I do. He had to write at the last moment, as he was leaving his office." And then, with a quiet, smiling face, she walked into the breakfast parlour.

"What does he say, Lily?" asked Bell.

"What would you give to know?" said Lily.

"I wouldn't give twopence for the whole of it," said Bell.

"When you get anybody to write to you letters, I wonder whether you'll show them to everybody?"

"But if there's any special London news, I suppose we might hear it," said Mrs. Dale.

"But suppose there's no special London news, mamma. The poor man had only been in town one day, you know: and there never is any news at this time of the year."

"Had he seen uncle Christopher?"

"I don't think he had; but he doesn't say. We shall get all the news from him when he comes. He cares much more about London news than Adolphus does." And then there was no more said about the letter.

But Lily had read her two former letters over and over again at the breakfast-table; and though she had not read them aloud, she had repeated many words out of them, and had so annotated upon them that her mother, who had heard her, could have almost re-written them. Now, she did not even show the paper; and then her absence, during which she had read the letter, had hardly exceeded a minute or two. All this Mrs. Dale observed, and she knew that her daughter had been again disappointed.

In fact that day Lily was very serious, but she did not appear to be unhappy. Early after breakfast Bell went over to the parsonage, and Mrs. Dale and her youngest daughter sat together over their work. "Mamma," she said, "I hope you and I are not to be divided when I go to live in London."

"We shall never be divided in heart, my love."

"Ah, but that will not be enough for happiness, though perhaps enough to prevent absolute unhappiness. I shall want to see you, touch you, and pet you as I do now." And she came and knelt on the cushion at her mother's feet.

"You will have some one else to caress and pet,—perhaps many others."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to throw me off, mamma?"

"God forbid, my darling. It is not mothers that throw off their children. What shall I have left when you and Bell are gone from me?"

"But we will never be gone. That's what I mean. We are to be just the same to you always, even though we are married. I must have my right to be here as much as I have it now; and, in return, you shall have your right to be there. His house must be a home to you,—not a cold place which you may visit now and again, with your best clothes on. You know what I mean, when I say that we must not be divided."

"But, Lily——"

"Well, mamma?"

"I have no doubt we shall be happy together,—you and I."

"But you were going to say more than that."

"Only this,—that your house will be his house, and will be full without me. A daughter's marriage is always a painful parting."

"Is it, mamma?"

"Not that I would have it otherwise than it is. Do not think that I would wish to keep you at home with me. Of course, you will both marry and leave me. I hope that he to whom you are going to devote yourself may be spared to love you and protect you." Then the widow's heart became too full, and she put away her child from her that she might hide her face.

"Mamma, mamma, I wish I was not going from you."

"No, Lily; do not say that. I should not be contented with life if I did not see both my girls married. I think that it is the only lot which can give to a woman perfect content and satisfaction. I would have you both married. I should be the most selfish being alive if I wished otherwise."

"Bell will settle herself near you, and then you

will see more of her and love her better than you do me."

"I shall not love her better."

"I wish she would marry some London man, and then you would come with us, and be near to us. Do you know, mamma, I sometimes think you don't like this place here."

"Your uncle has been very kind to give it to us."

"I know he has; and we have been very happy here. But if Bell should leave you—"

"Then should I go also. Your uncle has been very kind, but I sometimes feel that his kindness is a burden which I should not be strong enough to bear solely on my own shoulders. And what should keep me here, then?" Mrs. Dale as she said this felt that the "here" of which she spoke extended beyond the limits of the home which she held through the charity of her brother-in-law. Might not all the world, as far as she was concerned in it, be contained in that here? How was she to live if both her children should be taken away from her? She had already realized the fact that Crosbie's house could never be a home to her,—never even a temporary home. Her visits there must be of that full-dressed nature to which Lily had alluded. It was impossible that she could explain this to Lily. She would not prophesy that the hero of her girl's heart would be inhospitable to his wife's mother; but such had been her reading of Crosbie's character. Alas, alas, as matters were to go, his hospitality or inhospitality would be matter of small moment to them.

Again in the afternoon the two sisters were together, and Lily was still more serious than her wont. It might almost have been gathered from her manner that this marriage of hers was about to take place at once, and that she was preparing to leave her home. "Bell," she said, "I wonder why Dr. Crofts never comes to see us now?"

"It isn't a month since he was here, at our party."

"A month! But there was a time when he made some pretext for being here every other day."

"Yes, when mamma was ill."

"Ay, and since mamma was well, too. But I suppose I must not break the promise you made me give you. He's not to be talked about even yet, is he?"

"I didn't say he was not to be talked about. You know what I meant, Lily; and what I meant then, I mean now."

"And how long will it be before you mean something else? I do hope it will come some day,—I do indeed."

"It never will, Lily. I once fancied that I cared for Dr. Crofts, but it was only fancy. I know it, because——" She was going to explain that her knowledge on that point was assured to her, because since that day she had felt that she might have learned to love another man. But that other man had been Mr. Crosbie, and so she stopped herself.

"I wish he would come and ask you himself."

"He will never do so. He would never ask such a question without encouragement, and I shall give him none. Nor will he ever think of marrying till he can do so without,—without what he thinks to be imprudence as regards money. He has courage enough to be poor himself without unhappiness, but he has not courage to endure poverty with a wife. I know well what his feelings are."

"Well, we shall see," said Lily. "I shouldn't wonder if you were married first now, Bell. For my part I'm quite prepared to wait for three years."

Late on that evening the squire returned to Allington, Bernard having driven over to meet him at the station. He had telegraphed to his nephew that he would be back by a late train, and no more than this had been heard from him since he went. On that day Bernard had seen none of the ladies at the Small House. With Bell at the present moment it was impossible that he should be on easy terms. He could not meet her alone without recurring to the one special subject of interest between them, and as to that he did not choose to speak without much forethought.

He had not known himself, when he had gone about his wooing so lightly, thinking it a slight thing, whether or no he might be accepted. Now it was no longer a slight thing to him. I do not know that it was love that made him so eager; not good, honest, downright love. But he had set his heart upon the object, and with the wilfulness of a Dale was determined that it should be his. He had no remotest idea of giving up his cousin, but he had at last persuaded himself that she was not to be won without some toil, and perhaps also some delay.

Nor had he been in a humour to talk either to Mrs. Dale or to Lily. He feared that Lady Julia's news was true,—that at any rate there might be in it something of truth; and while thus in doubt he could not go down to the Small House. So he hung about the place by himself, with a cigar in his mouth, fearing that something evil was going to happen, and when the message came for him, almost shuddered as he seated himself in the gig. What would it become him to do in this emergency if Crosbie had truly been guilty of the villany with which Lady Julia had charged him? Thirty years ago he would have called the man out, and shot at him till one of them was hit. Now-a-days it was hardly possible for a man to do that; and yet what would the world say of him if he allowed such an injury as this to pass without vengeance?

His uncle, as he came forth from the station with his travelling-bag in his hand, was stern, gloomy, and silent. He came out and took his place in the gig almost without speaking. There were strangers about, and therefore his nephew at first could ask no question, but as the gig turned the corner out of the station-house yard he demanded the news.

"What have you heard?" he said.

But even then the squire did not answer at once. He shook his head, and turned away his face, as though he did not choose to be interrogated.

"Have you seen him, sir?" asked Bernard.

"No, he has not dared to see me."

"Then it is true?"

"True?—yes, it is all true. Why did you bring the scoundrel here? It has been your fault."

"No, sir; I must contradict that. I did not know him for a scoundrel."

"But it was your duty to have known him before you brought him here among them. Poor girl! how is she to be told?"

"Then she does not know it?"

"I fear not. Have you seen them?"

"I saw them yesterday, and she did not know it then; she may have heard it to-day."

"I don't think so. I believe he has been too great a coward to write to her. A coward indeed! How can any man find the courage to write such a letter as that?"

By degrees the squire told his tale. How he had gone to Lady Julia, had made his way to London, had tracked Crosbie to his club, and had there learned the whole truth from Crosbie's friend, Fowler Pratt, we already know. "The coward escaped me while I was talking to the man he sent down," said the squire. "It was a concerted plan, and I think he was right. I should have brained him in the hall of the club." On the following morning Pratt had called upon him at his inn with Crosbie's apology. "His apology!" said the squire. "I have it in my pocket. Poor reptile; wretched worm of a man! I cannot understand it. On my honour, Bernard, I do not understand it. I think men are changed since I knew much of them. It would have been impossible for me to write such a letter as that." He went on telling how Pratt had brought him this letter, and had stated that Crosbie declined an interview. "The gentleman had the goodness to assure me that no good could come from such a meeting. 'You mean,' I answered, 'that I cannot touch pitch and not be defiled!' He acknowledged that the man was pitch. Indeed, he could not say a word for his friend."

"I know Pratt. He is a gentleman. I am sure he would not excuse him."

"Excuse him! How could any one excuse him? Words could not be found to excuse him." And then he sat silent for some half mile. "On my honour, Bernard, I can hardly yet bring myself to believe it. It is so new to me. It makes me feel that the world is changed, and that it is no longer worth a man's while to live in it."

"And he is engaged to this other girl?"

"Oh, yes; with the full consent of the family. It is all arranged, and the settlements, no doubt, in the lawyer's hands by this time. He must have gone away from here determined to throw her over. Indeed, I don't suppose he ever meant to marry her. He was just passing away his time here in the country."

"He meant it up to the time of his leaving."

"I don't think it. Had he found me able and willing to give her a fortune he might, perhaps, have married her. But I don't think he meant it for a moment after I told him that she would have nothing. Well, here we are. I may truly say that I never before came back to my own house with so sore a heart."

They sat silently over their supper, the squire showing more open sorrow than might have been expected from his character. "What am I to say to them in the morning?" he repeated over and over again. "How am I to do it? And if I tell the mother, how is she to tell her child?"

"Do you think that he has given no intimation of his purpose?"

"As far as I can tell, none. That man Pratt knew that he had not done so yesterday afternoon. I asked him what were the intentions of his blackguard friend, and he said that he did not know—that Crosbie would probably have written to me. Then he brought me this letter. There it is," and the squire threw the letter over the table; "read it and let me have it back. He thinks probably that the trouble is now over as far as he is concerned."

It was a vile letter to have written—not because the language was bad, or the mode of expression unfeeling, or the facts falsely stated—but because the thing to be told was in itself so vile. There are deeds which will not bear a gloss—sins as to which the perpetrator cannot speak otherwise than as a reptile; circumstances which change a man and put upon him the worthlessness of vermin. Crosbie had struggled hard to write it, going home to do it after his last interview on that night with Pratt. But he had sat moodily in his chair at his lodgings, unable to take the pen in his hand. Pratt was to come to him at his office on the following morning, and he went to bed resolving that he would write it at his desk. On the next day Pratt was there before a word of it had been written.

"I can't stand this kind of thing," said Pratt. "If you mean me to take it, you must write it at once." Then, with inward groaning, Crosbie sat himself at his table, and the words at last were forthcoming. Such words as they were! "I know that I can have no excuse to make to you—or to her. But, circumstanced as I now am, the truth is the best. I feel that I should not make Miss Dale happy; and, therefore, as an honest man, I think I best do my duty by relinquishing the honour which she and you had proposed for me." There was more of it, but we all know of what words such letters are composed, and how men write when they feel themselves constrained to write as reptiles.

"As an honest man!" repeated the squire. "On my honour, Bernard, as a gentleman, I do not understand it. I cannot believe it possible that the man who wrote that letter was sitting the other day as a guest at my table."

"What are we to do to him?" said Bernard, after a while.

"Treat him as you would a rat. Throw your stick at him, if he comes under your feet; but beware, above all things, that he does not get into your house. That is too late for us now."

"There must be more than that, uncle."

"I don't know what more. There are deeds for committing which a man is doubly damned, because he has screened himself from overt punishment by the nature of his own villany. We have to remember Lily's name, and do what may best tend to her comfort. Poor girl! poor girl!"

Then they were silent, till the squire rose and took his bed candle. "Bernard," he said, "let my sister-in-law know early to-morrow that I will see her here, if she will be good enough to come to me after breakfast. Do not have anything else said at the Small House. It may be that he has written to-day."

Then the squire went to bed, and Bernard sat over the dining-room fire, meditating on it all. How would the world expect that he should behave to Crosbie? and what should he do when he met Crosbie at the club?

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BOARD

Crosbie, as we already know, went to his office in Whitehall on the morning after his escape from Sebright's, at which establishment he left the Squire of Allington in conference with Fowler Pratt. He had seen Fowler Pratt again that same night, and the course of the story will have shown what took place at that interview.

He went early to his office, knowing that he had before him the work of writing two letters, neither of which would run very glibly from his pen. One was to be his missive to the squire, to be delivered by his friend; the other, that fatal epistle to poor Lily, which, as the day passed away, he found himself utterly unable to accomplish. The letter to the squire he did write, under certain threats; and, as we have seen, was considered to have degraded himself to the vermin rank of humanity by the meanness of his production.

But on reaching his office he found that other cares awaited him,—cares which he would have taken much delight in bearing, had the state of his mind enabled him to take delight in anything. On entering the lobby of his office, at ten o'clock, he became aware that he was received by the messengers assembled there with almost more than their usual deference. He was always a great man at the General Committee Office; but there are shades of greatness and shades of deference, which, though quite beyond the powers of definition, nevertheless manifest themselves clearly to the experienced ear and eye. He walked through to his own apartment, and there found two official letters addressed to him lying on his table. The first which came to hand, though official, was small, and marked private, and it was addressed in the handwriting of his old friend, Butterwell, the outgoing secretary. "I shall see you in the morning, nearly as soon as you get this," said the semi-official note; "but I must be the first to congratulate you on the acquisition of my old shoes. They will be very easy in the wearing to you, though they pinched my corns a little at first. I dare say, they want new soling, and perhaps they are a little down at heels; but you will find some excellent cobbler to make them all right, and will give them a grace in the wearing which they have sadly lacked since they came into my possession. I wish you much joy with them," &c. &c. He then opened the larger official letter, but that had now but little interest for him. He could have made a copy of the contents without seeing them. The Board of Commissioners had had great pleasure in promoting him to the office of secretary, vacated by the promotion of Mr. Butterwell to a seat at their own Board; and then the letter was signed by Mr. Butterwell himself.

How delightful to him would have been this welcome on his return to his office had his heart in other respects been free from care! And as he thought of this, he remembered all Lily's charms. He told himself how much she excelled the noble scion of the De Courcy

stock, with whom he was now destined to mate himself; how the bride he had rejected excelled the one he had chosen in grace, beauty, faith, freshness, and all feminine virtues. If he could only wipe out the last fortnight from the facts of his existence! But fortnights such as those are not to be wiped out,—not even with many sorrowful years of tedious scrubbing.

And at this moment it seemed to him as though all those impediments which had frightened him when he had thought of marrying Lily Dale were withdrawn. That which would have been terrible with seven or eight hundred a year, would have been made delightful with twelve or thirteen. Why had his fate been so unkind to him? Why had not this promotion come to him but one fortnight earlier? Why had it not been declared before he had made his visit to that terrible castle? He even said to himself that if he had positively known the fact before Pratt had seen Mr. Dale, he would have sent a different message to the squire, and would have braved the anger of all the race of the De Courcys. But in that he lied to himself, and he knew that he did so. An earl, in his imagination, was hedged by so strong a divinity, that his treason towards Alexandrina could do no more than peep at what it would. It had been considered but little by him, when the project first offered itself to his mind, to jilt the niece of a small rural squire; but it was not in him to jilt the daughter of a countess.

That house full of babies in St. John's Wood appeared to him now under a very different guise from that which it wore as he sat in his room at Courcy Castle on the evening of his arrival there. Then such an establishment had to him the flavour of a graveyard. It was as though he were going to bury himself alive. Now that it was out of his reach, he thought of it as a paradise upon earth. And then he considered what sort of a paradise Lady Alexandrina would make for him. It was astonishing how ugly was the Lady Alexandrina, how old, how graceless, how destitute

of all pleasant charm, seen through the spectacles which he wore at the present moment.

During his first hour at the office he did nothing. One or two of the younger clerks came in and congratulated him with much heartiness. He was popular at his office, and they had got a step by his promotion. Then he met one or two of the elder clerks, and was congratulated with much less heartiness. "I suppose it's all right," said one bluff old gentleman. "My time is gone by, I know. I married too early to be able to wear a good coat when I was young, and I never was acquainted with any lords or lords' families." The sting of this was the sharper because Crosbie had begun to feel how absolutely useless to him had been all that high interest and noble connection which he had formed. He had really been promoted because he knew more about his work than any of the other men, and Lady De Courcy's influential relation at the India Board had not yet even had time to write a note upon the subject.

At eleven Mr. Butterwell came into Crosbie's room, and the new secretary was forced to clothe himself in smiles. Mr. Butterwell was a pleasant, handsome man of about fifty, who had never yet set the Thames on fire, and had never attempted to do so. He was perhaps a little more civil to great men and a little more patronizing to those below him than he would have been had he been perfect. But there was something frank and English even in his mode of bowing before the mighty ones, and to those who were not mighty he was rather too civil than either stern or supercilious. He knew that he was not very clever, but he knew also how to use those who were clever. He seldom made any mistake, and was very scrupulous not to tread on men's corns. Though he had no enemies, yet he had a friend or two; and we may therefore say of Mr. Butterwell that he had walked his path in life discreetly. At the age of thirty-five he had married a lady with some little fortune, and now he lived a pleasant, easy, smiling life in a villa at Putney. When

Mr. Butterwell heard, as he often did hear, of the difficulty which an English gentleman has of earning his bread in his own country, he was wont to look back on his own career with some complacency. He knew that he had not given the world much; yet he had received largely, and no one had begrudged it to him. "Tact," Mr. Butterwell used to say to himself, as he walked along the paths of his Putney villa. "Tact. Tact. Tact."

"Crosbie," he said, as he entered the room cheerily, "I congratulate you with all my heart. I do, indeed. You have got the step early in life, and you deserve it thoroughly;—much better than I did when I was appointed to the same office."

"Oh, no," said Crosbie, gloomily.

"But I say, Oh, yes. We are deuced lucky to have such a man, and so I told the commissioners."

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you."

"I've known it all along,—before you left even. Sir Raffle Buffle had told me he was to go to the Income-tax Office. The chair is two thousand there, you know; and I had been promised the first seat at the Board."

"Ah;—I wish I'd known," said Crosbie.

"You are much better as you are," said Butterwell. "There's no pleasure like a surprise! Besides, one knows a thing of that kind, and yet doesn't know it. I don't mind saying now that I knew it,—swearing that I knew it,—but I wouldn't have said so to a living being the day before yesterday. There are such slips between the cups and the lips. Suppose Sir Raffle had not gone to the Income-tax!"

"Exactly so," said Crosbie.

"But it's all right now. Indeed I sat at the Board yesterday, though I signed the letter afterwards. I'm not sure that I don't lose more than I gain."

"What! with three hundred a year more and less work?"

"Ah, but look at the interest of the thing. The secretary sees everything and knows everything. But

I'm getting old, and, as you say, the lighter work will suit me. By the by, will you come down to Putney to-morrow? Mrs. Butterwell will be delighted to see the new secretary. There's nobody in town now, so you can have no ground for refusing."

But Mr. Crosbie did find some ground for refusing. It would have been impossible for him to have sat and smiled at Mrs. Butterwell's table in his present frame of mind. In a mysterious, half-explanatory manner, he let Mr. Butterwell know that private affairs of importance made it absolutely necessary that he should remain that evening in town. "And indeed," as he said, "he was not his own master just at present."

"By the by,—of course not. I had quite forgotten to congratulate you on that head. So you're going to be married? Well; I'm very glad, and hope you'll be as lucky as I have been."

"Thank you," said Crosbie, again rather gloomily.

"A young lady from near Guestwick, isn't it; or somewhere in those parts?"

"N——no," stammered Crosbie. "The lady comes from Barsetshire."

"Why, I heard the name. Isn't she a Bell, or Tait, or Ball, or some such name as that?"

"No," said Crosbie, assuming what boldness he could command. "Her name is De Courcy."

"One of the earl's daughters?"

"Yes," said Crosbie.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I'd heard wrong. You're going to be allied to a very noble family, and I am heartily glad to hear of your success in life." Then Butterwell shook him very cordially by the hand,—having offered him no such special testimony of approval when under the belief that he was going to marry a Bell, a Tait, or a Ball. All the same, Mr. Butterwell began to think that there was something wrong. He had heard from an indubitable source that Crosbie had engaged himself to a niece of a squire with whom he had been staying near Guestwick,—a girl without any money; and Mr. Butterwell, in his

wisdom, had thought his friend Crosbie to be rather a fool for his pains. But now he was going to marry one of the De Courcys! Mr. Butterwell was rather at his wits' ends.

"Well; we shall be sitting at two, you know, and of course you'll come to us. If you're at leisure before that I'll make over what papers I have to you. I've not been a Lord Eldon in my office, and they won't break your back."

Immediately after that Fowler Pratt had been shown into Crosbie's room, and Crosbie had written the letter to the squire under Pratt's eye.

He could take no joy in his promotion. When Pratt left him he tried to lighten his heart. He endeavoured to throw Lily and her wrongs behind him, and fix his thoughts on his advancing successes in life; but he could not do it. A self-imposed trouble will not allow itself to be banished. If a man lose a thousand pounds by a friend's fault, or by a turn in the wheel of fortune, he can, if he be a man, put his grief down and trample it under foot; he can exorcise the spirit of his grievance, and bid the evil one depart from out of his house. But such exorcism is not to be used when the sorrow has come from a man's own folly and sin;—especially not if it has come from his own selfishness. Such are the cases which make men drink; which drive them on to the avoidance of all thought; which create gamblers and reckless prodigals; which are the promoters of suicide. How could he avoid writing this letter to Lily? He might blow his brains out, and so let there be an end of it all. It was to such reflections that he came, when he sat himself down endeavouring to reap satisfaction from his promotion.

But Crosbie was not a man to commit suicide. In giving him his due I must protest that he was too good for that. He knew too well that a pistol-bullet could not be the be-all and the end-all here, and there was too much manliness in him for so cowardly an escape. The burden must be borne. But how was he to bear it? There he sat till it was two o'clock,

neglecting Mr. Butterwell and his office papers, and not stirring from his seat till a messenger summoned him before the Board. The Board, as he entered the room, was not such a Board as the public may, perhaps, imagine such Boards to be. There was a round table, with a few pens lying about, and a comfortable leathern arm-chair at the side of it, farthest from the door. Sir Raffle Buffle was leaving his late colleagues, and was standing with his back to the fire-place, talking very loudly. Sir Raffle was a great bully, and the Board was uncommonly glad to be rid of him; but as this was to be his last appearance at the Committee Office, they submitted to his voice meekly. Mr. Butterwell was standing close to him, essaying to laugh mildly at Sir Raffle's jokes. A little man, hardly more than five feet high, with small but honest-looking eyes, and close-cut hair, was standing behind the arm-chair, rubbing his hands together, and longing for the departure of Sir Raffle, in order that he might sit down. This was Mr. Optimist, the new chairman, in praise of whose appointment the Daily Jupiter had been so loud, declaring that the present Minister was showing himself superior to all Ministers who had ever gone before him, in giving promotion solely on the score of merit. The Daily Jupiter, a fortnight since, had published a very eloquent article, strongly advocating the claims of Mr. Optimist, and was naturally pleased to find that its advice had been taken. Has not an obedient Minister a right to the praise of those powers which he obeys?

Mr. Optimist was, in truth, an industrious little gentleman, very well connected, who had served the public all his life, and who was, at any rate, honest in his dealings. Nor was he a bully, such as his predecessor. It might, however, be a question whether he carried guns enough for the command in which he was now to be employed. There was but one other member of the Board, Major Fiasco by name, a discontented, broken-hearted, silent man, who had been sent to the General Committee Office some few years before

because he was not wanted anywhere else. He was a man who had intended to do great things when he entered public life, and had possessed the talent and energy for things moderately great. He had also possessed to a certain extent the ear of those high in office; but, in some way, matters had not gone well with him, and in running his course he had gone on the wrong side of the post. He was still in the prime of life, and yet all men knew that Major Fiasco had nothing further to expect from the public or from the Government. Indeed, there were not wanting those who said that Major Fiasco was already in receipt of a liberal income, for which he gave no work in return; that he merely filled a chair for four hours a day four or five days a week, signing his name to certain forms and documents, reading, or pretending to read, certain papers, but, in truth, doing no good. Major Fiasco, on the other hand, considered himself to be a deeply injured individual, and he spent his life in brooding over his wrongs. He believed now in nothing and in nobody. He had begun public life striving to be honest, and he now regarded all around him as dishonest. He had no satisfaction in any man other than that which he found when some even would show to him that this or that other compeer of his own had proved himself to be self-interested, false, or fraudulent. "Don't tell me, Butterwell," he would say—for with Mr. Butterwell he maintained some semi-official intimacy, and he would take that gentleman by the button-hole, holding him close. "Don't tell me. I know what men are. I've seen the world. I've been looking at things with my eyes open. I knew what he was doing." And then he would tell of the sly deed of some official known well to them both, not denouncing it by any means, but affecting to take it for granted that the man in question was a rogue. Butterwell would shrug his shoulders, and laugh gently, and say that, upon his word, he didn't think the world so bad as Fiasco made it out to be.

Nor did he; for Butterwell believed in many things.

He believed in his Putney villa on this earth, and he believed also that he might achieve some sort of Putney villa in the world beyond without undergoing present martyrdom. His Putney villa first, with all its attendant comforts, and then his duty to the public afterwards. It was thus that Mr. Butterwell regulated his conduct; and as he was solicitous that the villa should be as comfortable a home to his wife as to himself, and that it should be specially comfortable to his friends, I do not think that we need quarrel with his creed.

Mr. Optimist believed in everything, but especially he believed in the Prime Minister, in the Daily Jupiter, in the General Committee Office, and in himself. He had long thought that everything was nearly right; but now that he himself was chairman at the General Committee Office, he was quite sure that everything must be right. In Sir Raffle Buffle, indeed, he had never believed; and now it was, perhaps, the greatest joy of his life that he should never again be called upon to hear the tones of that terrible knight's hated voice.

Seeing who were the components of the new Board, it may be presumed that Crosbie would look forward to enjoying a not uninfluential position in his office. There were, indeed, some among the clerks who did not hesitate to say that the new secretary would have it pretty nearly all his own way. As for "old Opt," there would be, they said, no difficulty about him. Only tell him that such and such a decision was his own, and he would be sure to believe the teller. Butterwell was not fond of work, and had been accustomed to lean upon Crosbie for many years. As for Fiasco, he would be cynical in words, but wholly indifferent in deed. If the whole office were made to go to the mischief, Fiasco, in his own grim way, would enjoy the confusion.

"Wish you joy, Crosbie," said Sir Raffle, standing up on the rug, waiting for the new secretary to go up to him and shake hands. But Sir Raffle was going, and the new secretary did not indulge him.

"Thank ye, Sir Raffle," said Crosbie, without going near the rug.

"Mr. Crosbie, I congratulate you most sincerely," said Mr. Optimist. "Your promotion has been the result altogether of your own merit. You have been selected for the high office which you are now called upon to fill solely because it has been thought that you are the most fit man to perform the onerous duties attached to it. Hum—h-m—ha. As regards my share in the recommendation which we found ourselves bound to submit to the Treasury, I must say that I never felt less hesitation in my life, and I believe I may declare as much as regards the other members of the Board." And Mr. Optimist looked around him for approving words. He had come forward from his standing ground behind his chair to welcome Crosbie, and had shaken his hand cordially.

Fiasco also had risen from his seat, and had assured Crosbie in a whisper that he had feathered his nest uncommon well. Then he had sat down again.

"Indeed you may, as far as I am concerned," said Butterwell.

"I told the Chancellor of the Exchequer," said Sir Raffle, speaking very loud and with much authority, "that unless he had some first-rate man to send from elsewhere I could name a fitting candidate. 'Sir Raffle,' he said, 'I mean to keep it in the office, and therefore shall be glad of your opinion.' 'In that case, Mr. Chancellor,' said I, 'Mr. Crosbie must be the man.' 'Mr. Crosbie shall be the man,' said the Chancellor. And Mr. Crosbie is the man."

"Your friend Sark spoke to Lord Brock about it," said Fiasco. Now the Earl of Sark was a young nobleman of much influence at the present moment, and Lord Brock was the Prime Minister. "You should thank Lord Sark."

"Had as much to do with it as if my footman had spoken," said Sir Raffle.

"I am very much obliged to the Board for their good opinion," said Crosbie, gravely. "I am obliged

to Lord Sark as well,—and also to your footman, Sir Raffle, if, as you seem to say, he has interested himself in my favour."

"I didn't say anything of the kind," said Sir Raffle. "I thought it right to make you understand that it was my opinion, given, of course, officially, which prevailed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Well, gentlemen, as I shall be wanted in the City, I will say good morning to you. Is my carriage ready, Boggs?" Upon which the attendant messenger opened the door, and the great Sir Raffle Buffle took his final departure from the scene of his former labours.

"As to the duties of your new office"—and Mr. Optimist continued his speech, taking no other notice of the departure of his enemy than what was indicated by an increased brightness of his eye and a more satisfactory tone of voice—"you will find yourself quite familiar with them."

"Indeed he will," said Butterwell.

"And I am quite sure that you will perform them with equal credit to yourself, satisfaction to the department, and advantage to the public. We shall always be glad to have your opinion on any subject of importance that may come before us; and as regards the internal discipline of the office, we feel that we may leave it safely in your hands. In any matter of importance you will, of course, consult us, and I feel very confident that we shall go on together with great comfort and with mutual confidence." Then Mr. Optimist looked at his brother commissioners, sat down in his arm-chair, and taking in his hands some papers before him, began the routine business of the day.

It was nearly five o'clock when, on this special occasion, the secretary returned from the board-room to his own office. Not for a moment had the weight been off his shoulders while Sir Raffle had been bragging or Mr. Optimist making his speech. He had been thinking, not of them, but of Lily Dale; and though they had not discovered his thoughts, they had perceived that he was hardly like himself.

"I never saw a man so little elated by good fortune in my life," said Mr. Optimist.

"Ah, he's got something on his mind," said Butterwell. "He's going to be married, I believe."

"If that's the case, it's no wonder he shouldn't be elated," said Major Fiasco, who was himself a bachelor.

When in his own room again, Crosbie at once seized on a sheet of note-paper, as though by hurrying himself on with it he could get that letter to Allington written. But though the paper was before him, and the pen in his hand, the letter did not, would not, get itself written. With what words was he to begin it? To whom should it be written? How was he to declare himself the villain which he had made himself? The letters from his office were taken away every night shortly after six, and at six o'clock he had not written a word. "I will do it at home to-night," he said to himself, and then, tearing off a scrap of paper, he scratched those few lines which Lily received, and which she had declined to communicate to her mother or sister. Crosbie, as he wrote them, conceived that they would in some way prepare the poor girl for the coming blow,—that they would, at any rate, make her know that all was not right; but in so supposing he had not counted on the constancy of her nature, nor had he thought of the promise which she had given him that nothing should make her doubt him. He wrote the scrap, and then taking his hat walked off through the gloom of the November evening up Charing Cross and St. Martin's Lane, towards the Seven Dials and Bloomsbury, into regions of the town, with which he had no business, and which he never frequented. He hardly knew where he went or wherefore. How was he to escape from the weight of the burden which was now crushing him? It seemed to him as though he would change his position with thankfulness for that of the junior clerk in his office, if only that junior clerk had upon his mind no such betrayal of trust as that of which he was guilty.

At half-past seven he found himself at Sebright's,

and there he dined. A man will dine, even though his heart be breaking. Then he got into a cab, and had himself taken home to Mount Street. During his walk he had sworn to himself that he would not go to bed that night till the letter was written and posted. It was twelve before the first words were marked on the paper, and yet he kept his oath. Between two and three, in the cold moonlight, he crawled out and deposited his letter in the nearest post-office.

CHAPTER XXIX

JOHN EAMES RETURNS TO BURTON CRESCENT

John Eames and Crosbie returned to town on the same day. It will be remembered how Eames had assisted Lord De Guest in the matter of the bull, and how great had been the earl's gratitude on the occasion. The memory of this, and the strong encouragement which he received from his mother and sister for having made such a friend by his gallantry, lent some slight satisfaction to his last hours at home. But his two misfortunes were too serious to allow of anything like real happiness. He was leaving Lily behind him, engaged to be married to a man whom he hated, and he was returning to Burton Crescent, where he would have to face Amelia Roper,—Amelia either in her rage or in her love. The prospect of Amelia in her rage was very terrible to him; but his greatest fear was of Amelia in her love. He had in his letter declined matrimony; but what if she talked down all his objections, and carried him off to church in spite of himself!

When he reached London and got into a cab with his portmanteau, he could hardly fetch up courage to bid the man drive him to Burton Crescent. "I might as well go to an hotel for the night," he said to himself, "and then I can learn how things are going on from Cradell at the office." Nevertheless, he did give the direction to Burton Crescent, and when it was once

given felt ashamed to change it. But, as he was driven up to the well-known door, his heart was so low within him that he might almost be said to have lost it. When the cabman demanded whether he should knock, he could not answer; and when the maid-servant at the door greeted him, he almost ran away.

"Who's at home?" said he, asking the question in a very low voice.

"There's missus," said the girl, "and Miss Spruce, and Mrs. Lupex. He's away somewhere, in his tantrums again; and there's Mr.——"

"Is Miss Roper here?" he said, still whispering.

"Oh, yes! Miss Mealyer's here," said the girl, speaking in a cruelly loud voice. "She was in the dining-room just now, putting out the table. Miss Mealyer!" And the girl, as she called out the name, opened the dining-room door. Johnny Eames felt that his knees were too weak to support him.

But Miss Mealyer was not in the dining-room. She had perceived the advancing cab of her sworn adorer, and had thought it expedient to retreat from her domestic duties, and fortify herself among her brushes and ribbons. Had it been possible that she should know how very weak and cowardly was the enemy against whom she was called upon to put herself in action, she might probably have fought her battle somewhat differently, and have achieved a speedy victory, at the cost of an energetic shot or two. But she did not know. She thought it probable that she might obtain power over him and manage him; but it did not occur to her that his legs were so weak beneath him that she might almost blow him over with a breath. None but the worst and most heartless of women know the extent of their own power over men; —as none but the worst and most heartless of men know the extent of their power over women. Amelia Roper was not a good specimen of the female sex, but there were worse women than her.

"She ain't there, Mr. Eames; but you'll see her in the drawen-room," said the girl. "And it's she'll be

glad to see you back again, Mr. Eames." But he scrupulously passed the door of the upstairs sitting-room, not even looking within it, and contrived to get himself into his own chamber without having encountered anybody. "Here's yer 'ot water, Mr. Eames," said the girl, coming up to him after an interval of half-an-hour; "and dinner'll be on the table in ten minutes. Mr. Cradell is come in, and so is missus's son."

It was still open to him to go out and dine at some eating-house in the Strand. He could start out, leaving word that he was engaged, and so postpone the evil hour. He had almost made up his mind to do so, and certainly would have done it, had not the sitting-room door opened as he was on the landing-place. The door opened, and he found himself confronting the assembled company. First came Cradell, and leaning on his arm, I regret to say, was Mrs. Lupex,—*Egyptia conjux!* Then there came Miss Spruce with young Roper; Amelia and her mother brought up the rear together. There was no longer question of flight now; and poor Eames, before he knew what he was doing, was carried down into the dining-room with the rest of the company. They were all glad to see him, and welcomed him back warmly, but he was so much beside himself that he could not ascertain whether Amelia's voice was joined with the others. He was already seated at table, and had before him a plate of soup, before he recognized the fact that he was sitting between Mrs. Roper and Mrs. Lupex. The latter lady had separated herself from Mr. Cradell as she entered the room. "Under all the circumstances perhaps it will be better for us to be apart," she said. "A lady can't make herself too safe; can she, Mrs. Roper? There's no danger between you and me, is there, Mr. Eames,—specially when Miss Amelia is opposite?" The last words, however, were intended to be whispered into his ear.

But Johnny made no answer to her; contenting himself for the moment with wiping the perspiration from

his brow. There was Amelia opposite to him, looking at him—the very Amelia to whom he had written, declining the honour of marrying her. Of what her mood towards him might be, he could form no judgment from her looks. Her face was simply stern and impassive, and she seemed inclined to eat her dinner in silence. A slight smile of derision had passed across her face as she heard Mrs. Lupex's whisper, and it might have been discerned that her nose, at the same time, became somewhat elevated; but she said not a word.

"I hope you've enjoyed yourself, Mr. Eames, among the vernal beauties of the country," said Mrs. Lupex.

"Very much, thank you," he replied.

"There's nothing like the country at this autumnal season of the year. As for myself, I've never been accustomed to remain in London after the breaking up of the *beau monde*. We've usually been to Broadstairs, which is a very charming place, with most elegant society, but now——" and she shook her head, by which all the company knew that she intended to allude to the sins of Mr. Lupex.

"I'd never wish to sleep out of London for my part," said Mrs. Roper. "When a woman's got a house over her head, I don't think her mind's ever easy out of it."

She had not intended any reflection on Mrs. Lupex for not having a house of her own, but that lady immediately bristled up. "That's just what the snails say, Mrs. Roper. And as for having a house of one's own, it's a very good thing, no doubt, sometimes; but that's according to circumstances. It has suited me lately to live in lodgings, but there's no knowing whether I mayn't fall lower than that yet, and have——" but here she stopped herself, and looking over at Mr. Cradell nodded her head.

"And have to let them," said Mrs. Roper. "I hope you'll be more lucky with your lodgers than I have been with some of mine. Jemima, hand the potatoes to Miss Spruce. Miss Spruce, do let me send you a

little more gravy? There's plenty here, really." Mrs. Roper was probably thinking of Mr. Todgers.

"I hope I shall," said Mrs. Lupex. "But, as I was saying, Broadstairs is delightful. Were you ever at Broadstairs, Mr. Cradell?"

"Never, Mrs. Lupex. I generally go abroad in my leave. One sees more of the world, you know. I was at Dieppe last June, and found that very delightful—though rather lonely. I shall go to Ostend this year; only December is so late for Ostend. It was a deuced shame my getting December, wasn't it, Johnny?"

"Yes, it was," said Eames. "I managed better."

"And what have you been doing, Mr. Eames?" said Mrs. Lupex, with one of her sweetest smiles. "Whatever it may have been, you've not been false to the cause of beauty, I'm sure." And she looked over to Amelia with a knowing smile. But Amelia was engaged upon her plate, and went on with her dinner without turning her eyes either on Mrs. Lupex or on John Eames.

"I haven't done anything particular," said Eames. "I've just been staying with my mother."

"We've been very social here, haven't we, Miss Amelia?" continued Mrs. Lupex. "Only now and then a cloud comes across the heavens, and the lights at the banquet are darkened." Then she put her handkerchief up to her eyes, sobbing deeply, and they all knew that she was again alluding to the sins of her husband.

As soon as dinner was over the ladies with young Mr. Roper retired, and Eames and Cradell were left to take their wine over the dining-room fire,—or their glass of gin and water, as it might be. "Well, Caudle, old fellow," said one. "Well, Johnny, my boy," said the other. "What's the news at the office?" said Eames.

"Muggeridge has been playing the very mischief." Muggeridge was the second clerk in Cradell's room. "We're going to put him into Coventry and not speak to him except officially. But to tell you the truth, my

hands have been so full here at home, that I haven't thought much about the office. What am I to do about that woman?"

"Do about her? How do about her?"

"Yes; what am I to do about her? How am I to manage with her? There's Lupex off again in one of his fits of jealousy."

"But it's not your fault, I suppose?"

"Well; I can't just say. I am fond of her, and that's the long and the short of it; deuced fond of her."

"But, my dear Caudle, you know she's that man's wife."

"Oh, yes, I know all about it. I'm not going to defend myself. It's wrong, I know,—pleasant, but wrong. But what's a fellow to do? I suppose in strict morality I ought to leave the lodgings. But, by George, I don't see why a man's to be turned out in that way. And then I couldn't make a clean score with old mother Roper. But I say, old fellow, who gave you the gold chain?"

"Well; it was an old family friend at Guestwick; or rather, I should say, a man who said he knew my father."

"And he gave you that because he knew your governor! Is there a watch to it?"

"Yes, there's a watch. It wasn't exactly that. There was some trouble about a bull. To tell the truth, it was Lord De Guest; the queerest fellow, Caudle, you ever met in your life; but such a trump. I've got to go and dine with him at Christmas." And then the old story of the bull was told.

"I wish I could find a lord in a field with a bull," said Cradell. We may, however, be permitted to doubt whether Mr. Cradell would have earned a watch even if he had had his wish.

"You see," continued Cradell, reverting to the subject on which he most delighted to talk, "I'm not responsible for that man's ill-conduct."

"Does anybody say you are?"

"No; nobody says so. But people seem to think so. When he is by I hardly speak to her. She is thoughtless and giddy, as women are, and takes my arm, and that kind of thing, you know. It makes him mad with rage, but upon my honour I don't think she means any harm."

"I don't suppose she does," said Eames.

"Well; she may or she mayn't. I hope with all my heart she doesn't."

"And where is he now?"

"This is between ourselves, you know; but she went to find him this afternoon. Unless he gives her money she can't stay here, nor, for the matter of that, will she be able to go away. If I mention something to you, you won't tell any one?"

"Of course I won't."

"I wouldn't have it known to any one for the world. I've lent her seven pounds ten. It's that which makes me so short with mother Roper."

"Then I think you're a fool for your pains."

"Ah, that's so like you. I always said you'd no feeling of real romance. If I cared for a woman I'd give her the coat off my back."

"I'd do better than that," said Johnny. "I'd give her the heart out of my body. I'd be chopped up alive for a girl I loved; but it shouldn't be for another man's wife."

"That's a matter of taste. But she's been to Lupex to-day at that house he goes to in Drury Lane. She had a terrible scene there. He was going to commit suicide in the middle of the street, and she declares that it all comes from jealousy. Think what a time I have of it—standing always, as one may say, on gunpowder. He may turn up here any moment, you know. But, upon my word, for the life of me I cannot desert her. If I were to turn my back on her she wouldn't have a friend in the world. And how's L. D.? I'll tell you what it is—you'll have some trouble with the divine Amelia."

"Shall I?"

"By Jove, you will. But how's L. D. all this time?"

"L. D. is engaged to be married to a man named Adolphus Crosbie," said poor Johnny, slowly. "If you please, we will not say any more about her."

"Whew—w—w! That's what makes you so down in the mouth! L. D. going to marry Crosbie! Why, that's the man who is to be the new secretary at the General Committee Office. Old Huffle Scuffle, who was their chair, has come to us, you know. There's been a general move at the G. C., and this Crosbie has got to be secretary. He's a lucky chap, isn't he?"

"I don't know anything about his luck. He's one of those fellows that make me hate them the first time I look at them. I've a sort of a feeling that I shall live to kick him some day."

"That's the time, is it? Then I suppose Amelia will have it all her own way now."

"I'll tell you what, Caudle. I'd sooner get up through the trap-door, and throw myself off the roof into the area, than marry Amelia Roper."

"Have you and she had any conversation since you came back?"

"Not a word."

"Then I tell you fairly you've got trouble before you. Amelia and Maria—Mrs. Lupex, I mean—are as thick as thieves just at present, and they have been talking you over. Maria—that is, Mrs. Lupex—lets it all out to me. You'll have to mind where you are, old fellow."

Eames was not inclined to discuss the matter any further, so he finished his toddy in silence. Cradell, however, who felt that there was something in his affairs of which he had reason to be proud, soon returned to the story of his own very extraordinary position. "By Jove, I don't know that a man was ever so circumstanced," he said. "She looks to me to protect her, and yet what can I do?"

At last Cradell got up, and declared that he must go to the ladies. "She's so nervous, that unless she has some one to countenance her she becomes unwell."

Eames declared his purpose of going to the divan, or to the theatre, or to take a walk in the streets. The smiles of beauty had no longer charms for him in Burton Crescent.

"They'll expect you to take a cup of tea the first night," said Cradell; but Eames declared that they might expect it.

"I'm in no humour for it," said he. "I'll tell you what, Cradell, I shall leave this place, and take rooms for myself somewhere. I'll never go into a lodging-house again."

As he so spoke, he was standing at the dining-room door; but he was not allowed to escape in this easy way. Jemima, as he went out into the passage, was there with a three-cornered note in her hand. "From Miss Mealyer," she said. "Miss Mealyer is in the back parlour all by herself."

Poor Johnny took the note, and read it by the lamp over the front door.

"Are you not going to speak to me on the day of your return? It cannot be that you will leave the house without seeing me for a moment. I am in the back parlour."

When he had read these words, he paused in the passage, with his hat on. Jemima, who could not understand why any young man should hesitate as to seeing his lady-love in the back parlour alone, whispered to him again, in her audible way, "Miss Mealyer is there, sir; and all the rest on 'em's upstairs!" So compelled, Eames put down his hat, and walked with slow steps into the back parlour.

How was it to be with the enemy? Was he to encounter Amelia in anger, or Amelia in love? She had seemed to be stern and defiant when he had ventured to steal a look at her across the dining-table, and now he expected that she would turn upon him with loud threatenings and protestations as to her wrongs. But it was not so. When he entered the room she was standing with her back to him, leaning on the mantel-piece, and at the first moment

she did not essay to speak. He walked into the middle of the room and stood there, waiting for her to begin.

"Shut the door!" she said, looking over her shoulder. "I suppose you don't want the girl to hear all you've got to say to me!"

Then he shut the door; but still Amelia stood with her back to him, leaning upon the mantel-piece.

It did not seem that he had much to say, for he remained perfectly silent.

"Well!" said Amelia, after a long pause, and she then again looked over her shoulder. "Well, Mr. Eames!"

"Jemima gave me your note, and so I've come," said he.

"And is this the way we meet!" she exclaimed, turning suddenly upon him, and throwing her long black hair back over her shoulders. There certainly was some beauty about her. Her eyes were large and bright, and her shoulders were well turned. She might have done as an artist's model for a Judith, but I doubt whether any man, looking well into her face, could think that she would do well as a wife. "Oh, John, is it to be thus, after love such as ours?" And she clasped her hands together, and stood before him.

"I don't know what you mean," said Eames.

"If you are engaged to marry L. D., tell me so at once. Be a man, and speak out, sir."

"No," said Eames; "I am not engaged to marry the lady to whom you allude."

"On your honour?"

"I won't have her spoken about. I'm not going to marry her, and that's enough."

"Do you think that I wish to speak of her? What can L. D. be to me as long as she is nothing to you? Oh, Johnny, why did you write me that heartless letter?" Then she leaned upon his shoulder—or attempted to do so.

I cannot say that Eames shook her off, seeing that

he lacked the courage to do so; but he shuffled his shoulder about so that the support was uneasy to her, and she was driven to stand erect again. "Why did you write that cruel letter?" she said again.

"Because I thought it best, Amelia. What's a man to do with ninety pounds a year, you know?"

"But your mother allows you twenty."

"And what's a man to do with a hundred and ten?"

"Rising five pounds every year," said the well-informed Amelia. "Of course we should live here, with mamma, and you would just go on paying her as you do now. If your heart was right, Johnny, you wouldn't think so much about money. If you loved me—as you said you did——" Then a little sob came, and the words were stopped. The words were stopped, but she was again upon his shoulder. What was he to do? In truth, his only wish was to escape, and yet his arm, quite in opposition to his own desires, found its way round her waist. In such a combat a woman has so many points in her favour! "Oh, Johnny," she said again, as soon as she felt the pressure of his arm. "Gracious, what a beautiful watch you've got!" and she took the trinket out of his pocket. "Did you buy that?"

"No; it was given to me."

"John Eames, did L. D. give it you?"

"No, no, no," he shouted, stamping on the floor as he spoke.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Amelia, quelled for the moment by his energy. "Perhaps it was your mother."

"No, it was a man. Never mind about the watch now."

"I wouldn't mind anything, Johnny, if you would tell me that you loved me again. Perhaps I oughtn't to ask you, and it isn't becoming in a lady; but how can I help it, when you know you've got my heart. Come upstairs and have tea with us now, won't you?"

What was he to do? He said that he would go up and have tea; and as he led her to the door he put

down his face and kissed her. Oh, Johnny Eames! But then a woman in such a contest has so many points in her favour.

CHAPTER XXX

IS IT FROM HIM?

I HAVE already declared that Crosbie wrote and posted the fatal letter to Allington, and we must now follow it down to that place. On the morning following the squire's return to his own house Mrs. Crump, the postmistress at Allington, received a parcel by post directed to herself. She opened it, and found an enclosure addressed to Mrs. Dale, with a written request that she would herself deliver it into that lady's own hand at once. This was Crosbie's letter.

"It's from Miss Lily's gentleman," said Mrs. Crump, looking at the handwriting. "There's something up, or he wouldn't be writing to her mamma in this way." But Mrs. Crump lost no time in putting on her bonnet, and trudging up with the letter to the Small House. "I must see the missus herself," said Mrs. Crump. Whereupon Mrs. Dale was called downstairs into the hall, and there received the packet. Lily was in the breakfast-parlour, and had seen the Postmistress arrive;—had seen also that she carried a letter in her hand. For a moment she had thought that it was for her, and imagined that the old woman had brought it herself from simple good-nature. But Lily, when she heard her mother mentioned, instantly withdrew and shut the parlour door. Her heart misgave her that something was wrong, but she hardly tried to think what it might be. After all, the regular postman might bring the letter she herself expected. Bell was not yet downstairs, and she stood alone over the tea-cups on the breakfast-table, feeling that there was something for her to fear. Her

mother did not come at once into the room but, after a pause of a moment or two, went again upstairs. So she remained, either standing against the table, or at the window or seated in one of the two arm-chairs, for a space of ten minutes, when Bell entered the room.

"Isn't mamma down yet?" said Bell.

"Bell," said Lily, "something has happened. Mamma has got a letter."

"Happened! What has happened? Is anybody ill? Who is the letter from?" And Bell was going to return through the door in search of her mother.

"Stop, Bell," said Lily. "Do not go to her yet. I think it's from—Adolphus."

"Oh, Lily, what do you mean?"

"I don't know, dear. We'll wait a little longer. Don't look like that, Bell." And Lily strove to appear calm, and strove almost successfully.

"You have frightened me so," said Bell.

"I am frightened myself. He only sent me one line yesterday, and now he has sent nothing. If some misfortune should have happened to him. Mrs. Crump brought down the letter herself to mamma, and that is so odd, you know."

"Are you sure it was from him?"

"No; I have not spoken to her. I will go up to her now. Don't you come, Bell. Oh! Bell, do not look so unhappy." She then went over and kissed her sister, and after that, with very gentle steps, made her way up to her mother's room. "Mamma, may I come in?" she said.

"Oh! my child!"

"I know it is from him, mamma. Tell me all at once."

Mrs. Dale had read the letter. With quick glancing eyes, she had made herself mistress of its whole contents, and was already aware of the nature and extent of the sorrow which had come upon them. It was a sorrow that admitted of no hope. The man who had written that letter could never return again;

nor if he should return could he be welcomed back to them. The blow had fallen, and it was to be borne. Inside the letter to herself had been a very small note addressed to Lily. "Give her the enclosed," Crosbie had said in his letter, "if you do not now think it wrong to do so. I have left it open, that you may read it." Mrs. Dale, however, had not yet read it, and she now concealed it beneath her handkerchief.

I will not repeat at length Crosbie's letter to Mrs. Dale. It covered four sides of letter-paper, and was such a letter that any man who wrote it must have felt himself to be a rascal. We saw that he had difficulty in writing it, but the miracle was, that any man could have found it possible to write it. "I know you will curse me," said he; "and I deserve to be cursed. I know that I shall be punished for this, and I must bear my punishment. My worst punishment will be this,—that I never more shall hold up my head again." And then, again, he said:—"My only excuse is my conviction that I should never make her happy. She has been brought up as an angel, with pure thoughts, with holy hopes, with a belief in all that is good, and high, and noble. I have been surrounded through my whole life by things low, and mean, and ignoble. How could I live with her, or she with me? I know now that this is so; but my fault has been that I did not know it when I was there with her. I choose to tell you all," he continued, towards the end of the letter, "and therefore I let you know that I have engaged myself to marry another woman. Ah! I can foresee how bitter will be your feelings when you read this: but they will not be so bitter as mine while I write it. Yes; I am already engaged to one who will suit me, and whom I may suit. You will not expect me to speak ill of her who is to be near and dear to me. But she is one with whom I may mate myself without an inward conviction that I shall destroy all her happiness by doing so. Lilian," he said, "shall always have my

prayers; and I trust that she may soon forget, in the love of an honest man, that she ever knew one so dishonest as—Adolphus Crosbie."

Of what like must have been his countenance as he sat writing such words of himself under the ghastly light of his own small, solitary lamp? Had he written his letter at his office, in the day-time, with men coming in and out of his room, he could hardly have written of himself so plainly. He would have bethought himself that the written words might remain, and be read hereafter by other eyes than those for which they were intended. But, as he sat alone, during the small hours of the night, almost repenting of his sin with true repentance, he declared to himself that he did not care who might read them. They should, at any rate, be true. Now they had been read by her to whom they had been addressed, and the daughter was standing before the mother to hear her doom.

"Tell me all at once," Lily had said; but in what words was her mother to tell her?

"Lily," she said, rising from her seat, and leaving the two letters on the couch; that addressed to her daughter was hidden beneath a handkerchief, but that which she had read she left open and in sight. She took both the girl's hands in hers as she looked into her face, and spoke to her. "Lily, my child!" Then she burst into sobs, and was unable to tell her tale.

"Is it from him, mamma? May I read it? He cannot be——"

"It is from Mr. Crosbie."

"Is he ill, mamma? Tell me at once. If he is ill I will go to him."

"No, my darling, he is not ill. Not yet;—do not read it yet. Oh, Lily! It brings bad news; very bad news."

"Mamma, if he is not in danger, I can read it. Is it bad to him, or only bad to me?"

At this moment the servant knocked, and not waiting for an answer half opened the door.

"If you please, ma'am, Mr. Bernard is below, and wants to speak to you."

"Mr. Bernard! ask Miss Bell to see him."

"Miss Bell is with him, ma'am, but he says that he specially wants to speak to you."

Mrs. Dale felt that she could not leave Lily alone. She could not take the letter away, nor could she leave her child with the letter open.

"I cannot see him," said Mrs. Dale. "Ask him what it is. Tell him I cannot come down just at present." And then the servant went and Bernard left his message with Bell.

"Bernard," she had said, "do you know of anything? Is there anything wrong about Mr. Crosbie?" Then, in a few words, he told her all, and understanding why his aunt had not come down to him, he went back to the Great House. Bell, almost stupefied by the tidings, seated herself at the table unconsciously, leaning upon her elbows.

"It will kill her," she said to herself. "My Lily, my darling Lily! It will surely kill her."

But the mother was still with the daughter, and the story was still untold.

"Mamma," said Lily, "whatever it is, I must, of course, be made to know it. I begin to guess the truth. It will pain you to say it. Shall I read the letter?"

Mrs. Dale was astonished at her calmness. It could not be that she had guessed the truth, or she would not stand like that, with tearless eyes and unquelled courage before her.

"You shall read it, but I ought to tell you first. Oh, my child, my own one!" Lily was now leaning against the bed, and her mother was standing over her, caressing her.

"Then tell me," said she. "But I know what it is. He has thought it all over while away from me, and he finds that it must not be as we have supposed. Before he went I offered to release him, and now he knows that he had better accept my offer. Is it so,

mamma?" In answer to this Mrs. Dale did not speak, but Lily understood from her signs that it was so.

"He might have written it to me, myself," said Lily, very proudly. "Mamma, we will go down to breakfast. He has sent nothing to me, then?"

"There is a note. He bids me read it, but I have not opened it. It is here."

"Give it me," said Lily, almost sternly. "Let me have his last words to me;" and she took the note from her mother's hands.

"Lily," said the note, "your mother will have told you all. Before you read these few words you will know that you have trusted one who was quite untrustworthy. I know that you will hate me.—I cannot even ask you to forgive me. You will let me pray that you may yet be happy.—A. C."

She read these few words, still leaning against the bed. Then she got up, and walking to a chair, seated herself with her back to her mother. Mrs. Dale moving silently after her stood over the back of the chair, not daring to speak to her. So she sat for some five minutes, with her eyes fixed upon the open window, and with Crosbie's note in her hand.

"I will not hate him, and I do forgive him," she said at last, struggling to command her voice, and hardly showing that she could not altogether succeed in her attempt. "I may not write to him again, but you shall write and tell him so. Now we will go down to breakfast." And so saying, she got up from her chair.

Mrs. Dale almost feared to speak to her, her composure was so complete, and her manner so stern and fixed. She hardly knew how to offer pity and sympathy, seeing that pity seemed to be so little necessary, and that even sympathy was not demanded. And she could not understand all that Lily had said. What had she meant by the offer to release him? Had there, then, been some quarrel between them before he went? Crosbie had made no such allusion in his

letter. But Mrs. Dale did not dare to ask any questions.

"You frighten me, Lily," she said. "Your very calmness frightens me."

"Dear mamma!" and the poor girl absolutely smiled as she embraced her mother. "You need not be frightened by my calmness. I know the truth well. I have been very unfortunate;—very. The brightest hopes of my life are all gone;—and I shall never again see him whom I love beyond all the world!" Then at last she broke down, and wept in her mother's arms.

There was not a word of anger spoken then against him who had done all this. Mrs. Dale felt that she did not dare to speak in anger against him, and words of anger were not likely to come from poor Lily. She, indeed, hitherto did not know the whole of his offence, for she had not read his letter.

"Give it me, mamma," she said at last. "It has to be done sooner or later."

"Not now, Lily. I have told you all,—all that you need know at present."

"Yes; now, mamma," and again that sweet silvery voice became stern. "I will read it now, and there shall be an end." Whereupon Mrs. Dale gave her the letter and she read it in silence. Her mother, though standing somewhat behind her, watched her narrowly as she did so. She was now lying over upon the bed, and the letter was on the pillow, as she propped herself upon her arm. Her tears were running, and ever and again she would stop to dry her eyes. Her sobs too were very audible, but she went on steadily with her reading till she came to the line on which Crosbie told that he had already engaged himself to another woman. Then her mother could see that she paused suddenly, and that a shudder slightly convulsed all her limbs.

"He has been very quick," she said, almost in a whisper; and then she finished the letter. "Tell him, mamma," she said, "that I do forgive him, and I will

not hate him. You will tell him that,—from me; will you not?" And then she raised herself from the bed.

Mrs. Dale would give her no such assurance. In her present mood her feelings against Crosbie were of a nature which she herself hardly could understand or analyze. She felt that if he were present she could almost fly at him as would a tigress. She had never hated before as she now hated this man. He was to her a murderer, and worse than a murderer. He had made his way like a wolf into her little fold, and torn her ewe-lamb and left her maimed and mutilated for life. How could a mother forgive such an offence as that, or consent to be the medium through which forgiveness should be expressed?

"You must, mamma; or, if you do not, I shall do so. Remember that I love him. You know what it is to have loved one single man. He has made me very unhappy; I hardly know yet how unhappy. But I have loved him, and do love him. I believe, in my heart, that he still loves me. Where this has been there must not be hatred and unforgiveness."

"I will pray that I may become able to forgive him," said Mrs. Dale.

"But you must write to him those words. Indeed you must, mamma! 'She bids me tell you that she has forgiven you, and will not hate you.' Promise me that!"

"I can make no promise now, Lily. I will think about it, and endeavour to do my duty."

Lily was now seated, and was holding the skirt of her mother's dress.

"Mamma," she said, looking up into her mother's face, "you must be very good to me now; and I must be very good to you. We shall be always together now. I must be your friend and counsellor; and be everything to you, more than ever. I must fall in love with you now;" and she smiled again, and the tears were almost dry upon her cheeks.

At last they went down to the breakfast-room, from which Bell had not moved. Mrs. Dale entered the

room first, and Lily followed, hiding herself for a moment behind her mother. Then she came forward boldly, and taking Bell in her arms, clasped her close to her bosom.

"Bell," she said, "he has gone."

"Lily! Lily! Lily!" said Bell, weeping.

"He has gone! We shall talk it over in a few days, and shall know how to do so without losing ourselves in misery. To-day we will say no more about it. I am so thirsty, Bell; do give me my tea;" and she sat herself down at the breakfast-table.

Lily's tea was given to her, and she drank it. Beyond that I cannot say that any of them partook with much heartiness of the meal. They sat there, as they would have sat if no terrible thunderbolt had fallen among them, and no word further was spoken about Crosbie and his conduct. Immediately after breakfast they went into the other room, and Lily, as was her wont, sat herself immediately down to her drawing. Her mother looked at her with wistful eyes, longing to bid her spare herself, but she shrank from interfering with her. For a quarter of an hour Lily sat over her board, with her brush or pencil in her hand, and then she rose up and put it away.

"It's no good pretending," she said. "I am only spoiling the things; but I will be better to-morrow. I'll go away and lie down by myself, mamma." And so she went.

Soon after this Mrs. Dale took her bonnet and went up to the Great House, having received her brother-in-law's message from Bell.

"I know what he has to tell me," she said; "but I might as well go. It will be necessary that we should speak to each other about it." So she walked across the lawn, and up into the hall of the Great House. "Is my brother in the book-room?" she said to one of the maids; and then knocking at the door, went in unannounced.

The squire rose from his arm-chair, and came forward to meet her.

"Mary," he said, "I believe you know it all."

"Yes," she said. "You can read that," and she handed him Crosbie's letter. "How was one to know that any man could be so wicked as that?"

"And she has heard it?" asked the squire. "Is she able to bear it?"

"Wonderfully! She has amazed me by her strength. It frightens me; for I know that a relapse must come. She has never sunk for a moment beneath it. For myself, I feel as though it were her strength that enables me to bear my share of it." And then she described to the squire all that had taken place that morning.

"Poor child!" said the squire. "Poor child! What can we do for her? Would it be good for her to go away for a time? She is a sweet, good, lovely girl, and has deserved better than that. Sorrow and disappointment come to us all; but they are doubly heavy when they come so early."

Mrs. Dale was almost surprised at the amount of sympathy which he showed.

"And what is to be his punishment?" she asked.

"The scorn which men and women will feel for him; those, at least, whose esteem or scorn are matters of concern to any one. I know no other punishment. You would not have Lily's name brought before a tribunal of law?"

"Certainly not that."

"And I will not have Bernard calling him out. Indeed, it would be for nothing; for in these days a man is not expected to fight duels."

"You cannot think that I would wish that."

"What punishment is there, then? I know of none. There are evils which a man may do, and no one can punish him. I know of nothing. I went up to London after him, but he continued to crawl out of my way. What can you do to a rat but keep clear of him?"

Mrs. Dale had felt in her heart that it would be well if Crosbie could be beaten till all his bones were

sore. I hardly know whether such should have been a woman's thought, but it was hers. She had no wish that he should be made to fight a duel. In that there would have been much that was wicked, and in her estimation nothing that was just. But she felt that if Bernard would thrash the coward for his cowardice she would love her nephew better than ever she had loved him. Bernard also had considered it probable that he might be expected to horsewhip the man who had jilted his cousin, and, as regarded the absolute bodily risk, he would not have felt any insuperable objection to undertake the task. But such a piece of work was disagreeable to him in many ways. He hated the idea of a row at his club. He was most desirous that his cousin's name should not be made public. He wished to avoid anything that might be impolitic. A wicked thing had been done, and he was quite ready to hate Crosbie as Crosbie ought to be hated; but as regarded himself, it made him unhappy to think that the world might probably expect him to punish the man who had so lately been his friend. And then he did not know where to catch him, or how to thrash him when caught. He was very sorry for his cousin, and felt strongly that Crosbie should not be allowed to escape. But what was he to do?

"Would she like to go anywhere?" said the squire again, anxious, if he could, to afford solace by some act of generosity. At this moment he would have settled a hundred a year for life upon his niece if by so doing he could have done her any good.

"She will be better at home," said Mrs. Dale. "Poor thing. For a while she will wish to avoid going out."

"I suppose so;" and then there was a pause. "I'll tell you what, Mary; I don't understand it. On my honour I don't understand it. It is to me as wonderful as though I had caught the man picking my pence out of my pocket. I don't think any man in the position of a gentleman would have done such a thing

when I was young. I don't think any man would have dared to do it. But now it seems that a man may act in that way and no harm come to him. He had a friend in London who came to me and talked about it as though it were some ordinary, everyday transaction of life. Yes; you may come in, Bernard. The poor child knows it all now."

Bernard offered to his aunt what of solace and sympathy he had to offer, and made some sort of half-expressed apology for having introduced this wolf into their flock. "We always thought very much of him at his club," said Bernard.

"I don't know much about your London clubs now-a-days," said his uncle, "nor do I wish to do so if the society of that man can be endured after what he has now done."

"I don't suppose half-a-dozen men will ever know anything about it," said Bernard.

"Umph!" ejaculated the squire. He could not say that he wished Crosbie's villany to be widely discussed, seeing that Lily's name was so closely connected with it. But yet he could not support the idea that Crosbie should not be punished by the frown of the world at large. It seemed to him that from this time forward any man speaking to Crosbie should be held to have disgraced himself by so doing.

"Give her my best love," he said, as Mrs. Dale got up to take her leave; "my very best love. If her old uncle can do anything for her she has only to let me know. She met the man in my house, and I feel that I owe her much. Bid her come and see me. It will be better for her than moping at home. And, Mary"—this he said to her, whispering into her ear—"think of what I said to you about Bell."

Mrs. Dale, as she walked back to her own house, acknowledged to herself that her brother-in-law's manner was different to her from anything that she had hitherto known of him.

During the whole of that day Crosbie's name was not mentioned at the Small House. Neither of the

girls stirred out, and Bell spent the greater part of the afternoon sitting, with her arm round her sister's waist, upon the sofa. Each of them had a book; but though there was little spoken, there was as little read. Who can describe the thoughts that were passing through Lily's mind as she remembered the hours which she had passed with Crosbie, of his warm assurances of love, of his accepted caresses, of her uncontrolled and acknowledged joy in his affection? It had all been holy to her then; and now those things which were then sacred had been made almost disgraceful by his fault. And yet as she thought of this she declared to herself over and over again that she would forgive him;—nay, that she had forgiven him. "And he shall know it, too," she said, speaking almost out loud.

"Lily, dear Lily," said Bell, "turn your thoughts away from it for a while, if you can."

"They won't go away," said Lily. And that was all that was said between them on the subject.

Everybody would know it! I doubt whether that must not be one of the bitterest drops in the cup which a girl in such circumstances is made to drain. Lily perceived early in the day that the parlour-maid well knew that she had been jilted. The girl's manner was intended to convey sympathy; but it did convey pity; and Lily for a moment felt angry. But she remembered that it must be so, and smiled upon the girl, and spoke kindly to her. What mattered it? All the world would know it in a day or two.

On the following day she went up, by her mother's advice, to see her uncle.

"My child," said he, "I am sorry for you. My heart bleeds for you."

"Uncle," she said, "do not mind it. Only do this for me,—do not talk about it,—I mean to me."

"No, no; I will not. That there should ever have been in my house so great a rascal——"

"Uncle! Uncle! I will not have that! I will not listen to a word against him from any human being,

—not a word! Remember that!" And her eyes flashed as she spoke.

He did not answer her, but took her hand and pressed it, and then she left him. "The Dales were ever constant!" he said to himself, as he walked up and down the terrace before his house. "Ever constant!"

END OF VOL. I.

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